New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1947

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Theatre Critics Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK TIMES

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"Allegro"

The New York Times

OCTOBER 11, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having carried song-writing to its logical conclusion, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II have gone one step further. They have composed a musical play without any of the conventions of form. "Allegro," which was sung at the Majestic last evening. For at least half its length it is a work of great beauty and purity, as if "Our Town" could be written in music. To quote the program: "The story starts in 1905 on the day Joseph Taylor Jr. is born, and follows his life to his thirty-fifth year."

Looking at young Joe affectionately through the mists of sentiment Mr. Hammerstein and Mr. Rodgers have created something of magnificence in these early years of American life. The story has style and character; the music enriches it; the staging has the eloquent simplicity of genuine art. Until the disaster of 1929 overtakes it, "Allegro" has the lyric rapture of a musical masterpiece.

* * *

Even after 1929 it is a musical play of superior quality. For Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein are able composers in any vein, and they have some notable numbers for the modern portion of their play. "Money Isn't Everything" is skilful satire of materialism; "Yatata, Yatata, Yatata" is a savage cartoon of cocktail parties, and "The Gentleman Is a Dope" is top-drawer blues music, particularly as Lisa Kirk sings it.

If the first half of "Allegro" were not so overwhelming, the commonplaceness of the second act would be hardly worth noting. Perhaps it is only commonplace by comparison.

For the long first half is the comedy of growing up in America, told with tenderness and compassion. Although Joe is an average lad, the authors respect him and guide him through his boyhood, college and his marriage with idyllic paternalism.

Abandoning the routine of musical comedy choruses, "Allegro" returns the chorus to its original function as comment and interpretation. All the elements of theatre are so perfectly blended that the music and the ballet are interwoven into one singing pattern of narrative; and here "Allegro" is torn out of the folk life of America.

* * *

Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein have had appreciative assistance. In honor of an epochal attempt, Jo Mielziner has created simple and spacious décor with shadowy overtones of narrative. Lucinda Ballard's costumes are beautiful. Agnes de Mille has given the play fresh direction with a number of original and clarifying ideas that leave the stage wide open for dancing. Although she has composed a number of beguiling ballets, it is difficult to recall them as music-hall numbers, for they open spontaneously out of the narrative. Kathryn Lee dances the most memorable one.

Part of the enchantment of "Allegro" springs from the good taste of the casting. The acting and singing escape the clichés of the musical stage. As Joseph Taylor Jr, the youthful hero of this odyssey, John Battles' candor and innocence are admirable and effecting. His parents are played with the same modest honesty by Annamary Dickey and William Ching.

John Conte plays a roommate and companion with friendly loyalty. Particularly in the first half of the evening, Roberta Jonay is coquettishly lovely without striking a common note; and the long cast includes a number of agreeable performers who have caught the spirit of an extraordinary enterprise.

For "Allegro" has made history on Broadway. Before the mood breaks after the first act it is full of a kind of unexploited glory. If this review sounds ungratefully reluctant it is because Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein have just missed the final splendor of a perfect work of art.

'ALLEGRO.'

Musical play, with music by Richard Rodgers; book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein 2d; direction and choreography by Agnes de Mille; settings and lighting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Lucinda Ballard; production supervised by Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn; orchestrations by Russell Bennett; orchestra directed by Salvatore Dell'Isola; presented by the Theater Guild at the Majestic Theater Friday evening, October 10, 1947. The cast:

Marjorie Taylor	Annamary Dickey
Dr. Joseph Taylor	William Ching
Mayor	Edward Platt
Grandma Taylor	Muriel O'Malley
Friends of Joey	Ray Harrison and Frank Westbrook
Jennie Brinker	Roberta Jonay
Principal	Robert Byrn
Mabel	Evelyn Taylor
Bicycle boy	Stanley Simmons
Georgie	Harrison Muller
Hazel	Kathryn Lee
Charlie Townsend	John Conte
Joseph Taylor Jr.	John Battles
Miss Lipscomb	Susan Svetlik
Cheer leaders	Charles Tate and Sam Steen
Coach	Wilson Smith
Ned Brinker	Paul Parks
English professor	David Collyer
Chemistry professor	William McCully
Greek professor	Raymond Keast
Biology professor	Robert Bryn
Philosophy professor	Blake Ritter
Shakespeare student	Susan Svetlik
Bertram Woolhaven	Ray Harrison
Molly	Katrina Van Oss
Beulah	Gloria Wills
Minister	Edward Platt
Millie	Julie Humphries
Dot	Sylvia Karlton
Addie	Patricia Bybell
Dr. Bigby Denby	Lawrence Fletcher
Mrs. Melhouse	Frances Reiner
Mrs. Lansdale	Lily Paget
Jarman, a butler	Bill Bradley
Maid	Jean Houlcoss
Emily	Lisa Kirk
Doorman	Tom Perkins
Brock Lansdale	Stephen Chase
Berkley	Wilson Smith

SYNOPSIS: The story starts in 1905 on the day Joseph Taylor Jr., is born and follows his life to his thirty-fifth year. The three major locations of action are: Act I—His home town and his college town. Act II—A large city.

The Sun

OCTOBER 11, 1947

'Allegro' Is a Distinguished Musical Play, Excitingly Produced at Majestic.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Allegro" is a distinguished and tumultuous musical play. The new Rodgers & Hammerstein product, brought into the Majestic last night by the Theater Guild, is excitingly unconventional in form and it takes its place alongside of "Oklahoma!" and "Carousel" as a theatrical piece of taste, imagination and showmanship.

This new "Allegro" is produced with stark simplicity. There is no scenery in the accepted sense. Permanent platforms are used, and Joe Mielziner's magical scene changes and effects are done with treadmills, curtains, colored slides, a few props and odds and ends of furniture.

"Allegro" has both solemnity and humor. Richard Rodgers has contributed some hypnotic music, the lyrics of Oscar Hammerstein 2d are pungent, and his story, if somewhat trite, is at least compact. The Hammerstein libretto is projected with the use of Agnes de Mille's enchanting ballet effects, and with the production's chorus serving in the role of a Greek chorus. Some of the sharpest dialogue is supplied in the form of comment from the chorus.

The Hammerstein book, which lets you down somewhat in the play's second act when it gets somewhat deeply into the city versus the country theme—something of the same note struck by Clyde Fitch in "The City" as far back as 1909—presents thirty-five years in the life of Joe Taylor Jr., son of a small-town doctor. Joe is followed from his birth through college, into marriage, and into the city, where he takes up a lucrative practice as a doctor for the rich. He is betrayed by his wife, and finally renounces it all to go back to the little town for a more useful life among people he knows and understands.

It is a simple story, but it becomes frequently touching and occasionally exalted as the chanting of the chorus and the music of Rodgers—sometimes humorous, sometimes gay, sometimes disturbingly somber—are carried along with it. There was a brief and delightful interlude in the first half when Rodgers turned back to a melody of his early years, "In a Mountain Greenery." His new songs that are outstanding are "One Foot, Other Foot," "What a Lovely Day for a Wedding," "A Darn Nice Campus," "A Fellow Needs a Girl" and "Yatata, Yatata, Yatata," a devstating satire on the antics of the big-city cocktail set.

Rodgers and Hammerstein have done this new piece as they wanted to do it, with a cast consisting largely of new people—or nearly new. John Battles is an affecting Joe Taylor—forthright, bewildered and believable. Roberta Jonay is excellent as the small-town girl who marries her Joe and turns out to be a hussy once she is caught up in the whirl of the metropolis. Annamary Dickey and William Ching play Joe's parents tenderly. John Conte is enormously likable as Joe's cynical friend. Lisa Kirk is excellent as the nurse who sees Joe as the man he really could be. Gloria Wills turns in one of the evening's most amusing scenes. Kathryn Lee dances entrancingly and Lucinda Ballard's costumes are in fine taste, as they always are.

"Allegro" is a musical play of beauty and dignity, produced with perception and imagination. Our theatrical season is getting to be pretty wonderful.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 11, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

A Memorable Musical

A MUSICAL play of rare distinction has made its advent at the Majestic. "Allegro" is no ordinary song and dance production. Conceived by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, II in the happiest of collaborations, and staged to split-second perfection by Agnes de Mille, this is a show to be remembered with "Show Boat," "Oklahoma," or whatever other blend of melody, drama and ballet which might contend for top honors in its field. The Theater Guild has launched its thirtieth season magnificently. Although there are no well known stars in the cast and musical comedy conventions are rather rudely violated, the offering is a consummate theatrical achievement and an electrifying entertainment.

* * *

Rodgers may not have written his most haunting score for this fable of a small town doctor's son, taking the curious buffets of fate from his birth in 1905 to a crucial decision thirty-five years later. Much of the music is subordinated to a plot of depth and emotional power. The title number serves to accompany a superb bit of de Mille choreography, in which the frenetic aspects of modern living are underlined in no uncertain manner. At the same time, the gifted composer has written such eloquent tunes as "A Fellow Needs a Girl," "You Are Never Away" or "So Far," which will distinguish juke boxes across the land.

* * *

Hammerstein, on his part, has written a cohesive libretto and pertinent lyrics to make a true "musical play." With the strictest of chronology, he has traced the career of Joseph Taylor jr. with unerring touches, employing a sort of Greek chorus to commentate on events in the biography, capturing the full spirit of the '20s, when the hero went to college, fell in love and got trapped by an ambitious sweetheart and falling back on straight pantomime for the most moving chapter in the work. He has had superlative aid from Miss De Mille, who emerges as a great director in addition to a celebrated dance arranger in "Allegro." In addition Jo Mielziner has devised a fluent and simple decor and Lucinda Ballard has designed perfect costumes.

It may seem remiss to have neglected the performing for so long in a review, but the fact remains that it is so beautifully integrated in a boldly exciting and original show that it can attend applause. Annamary Dickey is splendid as Joe's mother, who bequeathes him an abiding dignity and integrity. John Battles is perfect as the hero and Roberta Jonay succeeds in being both romantically attractive and venomous as the prideful sweetheart and wife. William Ching gives a fine account of himself as the elder Taylor and Muriel O'Malley has a resplendent moment or two as grandma. Meanwhile Gloria Wills does a superlative bit as a campus tramp and John Conte steadies every scene in which he appears as Joe's best friend. 'Allegro" has bitter overtones, as it celebrates a rather frenzied era, but it is a memorable musical comedy.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 11, 1947

'Allegro' an Elaborate Sermon By Two Very Serious Showmen

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "Allegro" Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d have gone philosophical; sententious, even. The title of their musical play, which the Theatre Guild presented last evening at the Majestic Theatre, refers to the tempo of life they are philosophizing about, and not, I fearfully believe, to the show itself. They have set "Allegro" to an andante beat.

This famous pair, who have made people glad to be alive with "Oklahoma" and have exquisitely wrung their hearts with "Carousel," are artists. Therefore much of what they have done in "Allegro" is notable for its imagination and sensitivity.

Their songs seem rigidly stylized, to fit mood and story; and, although many of them are lovely, not many bust loose and make a bid for immediate popular acceptance.

Their story veers sharply away from the common practice of the musical stage both in the way it is presented—which reminds me some of "Our Town"—and in its content. The boy-girl romance here leads to discontent and infidelity; the girl is shallow and selfish, and the boy, when he is mature, must find another love.

Rodgers and Hammerstein have not altogether forgotten that they are entertainers—among the best entertainers we have—and moments of gaiety may be found in "Allegro." But in the show itself they seem to disapprove of levity, and in the plot they defend their attitude against such profoundly regretful opinions as this one.

Go Back to the Country.

In the song number from which they get their title they argue that the allegro pace of a big city, with its hollow frauds and cheap pleasures, is the wrong tempo. A better rhythm for life would be the more placid one of smaller places.

It seems odd to be writing a sobersided piece like this about a show with some grand dances, pretty girls and good jokes—but that's the mood I'm in. And I guess it's the mood Rodgers and Hammerstein intend me to be in.

"Allegro" is the biography of Joseph Taylor Jr., son of a small-town doctor, from the day he is born to the day, 35 years later, that he renounces big-city medical practice, striped pants, cocktail parties, society screwballs and even his wife and goes back to where he came from with a loyal nurse who has faith in his simple nature.

Fine Choral Work.

An excellent mixed chorus tells of Joe's birth and early years, and the event of Baby's first step is rousingly recounted in a number titled "One Foot, Other Foot." Not until Joe gets to college do things liven up, though. At college is a delightfully amusing Freshman Dance number, with the youngsters wearing the horrible clothes and committing the horrible contortions of years ago, to the tune of Rodgers' gay old "Mountain Greenery."

People die in the story—Joe's grandmother and mother — but their ghosts come back and try, fruitlessly, to steer him straight. He marries the wrong girl and gives in to her when she wants the dazzle and wealth of a big city. The one scene which really touched me emotionally is the one where Joe, now an upcoming doctor, says goodbye to his small-town father.

Agnes de Mille has staged the dances and the book as well—creditably on both counts, although in her dance numbers I think she evidences some psychosis about having boys pick girls up and carry them around like babies instead of babes.

Simple Setting.

The mise-en-scene, by Jo Mielziner, is not elaborate—a few skeletonized props which slide on and off, as in "Dream Girl," and a lantern-slide screen for a backdrop on which a few decorations are rather ineffectually projected.

The company is huge, and first class. Annamary Dickey sings charmingly as the mother, and so does Muriel O'Malley as the grandmother, Roberta Jonay, from Hollywood, plays the wrong girl and gets one break when she partakes in an amusing quintet, "Money Isn't Everything." The best of the solo dances is performed by Kathryn Lee for this same number.

As Joe, John Battles is admirable, particularly in the days when he is an awkward freshman making his first pass at a town girl. John Conte also is very good as his pleasure-loving roommate. Russell Bennett's orchestration of the Rodgers score is top-flight.

But I still feel pretty solemn about it all.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 11, 1947

'Allegro' Is Perfect And Great

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Perfection is a thrilling thing, be it a Sid Luckman forward pass, a Ken Strong place kick, a Joe DiMaggio catch of an outfield drive, a Cushing brain operation, a Rembrandt painting, a Whistler etching, a Markova-Dolin "Giselle" or "Allegro," the great new musical by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, which the Theatre Guild brought to the Majestic Theatre last evening.

Perfection and great are not words to be lightly used. They have become commonplace through misuse. But "Allegro" is perfection, great. It is a stunning blending of beauty, integrity, intelligence, imagination, taste and skill. It races the pulses and puts lumps in the throat. But for its utmost enjoyment, the patron out front must respond with mind and heart.

"Allegro" is a sort of "Our Town" set to music. And there are overtones of "Man and Superman" and "A Man to Remember." It is the story of a boy born to be a doctor. An honest and capable boy. Grown to manhood and educated to serve his fellow man, he marries the wrong girl. An ambitious, determined, treacherous hussy, who forces him to give up a practice in his hometown to become associated with a go-getter in a big city.

His grasp of medicine is threatened by ministering to rich neurotics. His happiness is destroyed by his wife's mania for money and social position. He finally is brought to his senses by a cynical college mate, a decent young nurse and a marital scandal. So back home he goes to serve people who need him.

Agnes de Mille, heretofore famed as a choreographer, has directed the production as well as the dances for "Allegro." Henceforth she will be famed as director and choreographer. Her choreography is magnificent, by all odds the finest work of her career. And her staging of the book is superb.

The list of principals—of singers, dancers and actors—is long, but every name on it merits a grateful salute. Particularly Annamary Dickey, William Ching, Muriel O'Malley, Roberta Jonay, Joan Conte, John Battles, Wilson Smith, Paul Parks, Lawrence Fletcher, Lisa Kirk and Kathryn Lee.

"Allegro" should be embraced affectionately by discriminating playgoers. It lends new stature to the American musical stage.

PM

OCTOBER 13, 1947

Kronenberger

Rodgers & Hammerstein Come a Real Cropper

Allegro, I'm afraid I must say right off, is a very grave disappointment. I'm afraid, in fact, that it can be called an out-and-out failure.

Perhaps there are allowances to be made—such as that the show had far too much build-up; or that the authors were tackling something new. But neither publicity nor pioneering really explains much of the matter. For one could have gone to *Allegro* with pretty modest expectations and still have come away let down. Again, it's not rough edges, or bold strokes that don't come off, which damage *Allegro*. On the contrary, the one thing this Rodgers and Hammerstein experiment clearly has is complete professional smoothness.

• • •

What it hasn't got is any real quality; what it hasn't got is any real lure. Presumably it set out to tell, with the help of music and chorus and dancing, a very simple American story. But on a good many occasions, *Allegro* didn't know the difference between the simple and the over-weighted; and on a good many more, it didn't know the difference between the simple and the obvious. Sometimes rouged with satire, sometimes rosy with song, a hundred clichés of American thinking and emotion marched by in procession, on a very vast, very unhomey, very trick-lighted stage. Had the clichés merely sauntered by, no bigger than life, you might have forgotten their age and focussed on their truthfulness. As it was, they left you quite unmoved; they left you downright bored.

• • •

And that's the really strange thing about *Allegro*—not that it lacks depth but that it lacks showmanship; not that it's bad but that it's boring. Its story of Joe Taylor, a typical middle-class boy, a small-town doctor's son, who grows up to become a doctor, too; who marries a success-worshipping hussy and lets her drag him off to a big city; who prospers handsomely there but finds his world all phony and his wife unfaithful; and who finally renounces success and goes back home to practice—its story never has the lift or edge of real theater. All the twists and devices of a Greek chorus don't help much. All Agnes de Mille's resources of dancing and ballet produce only scattered bits of color and liveliness. All Mr. Rodgers' orchestral writing and choral writing and popular songs, however pleasant in spots, have neither the lilt nor the authority of a proper Rodgers score. And Joe's story never misses more than at the end. His renunciation has no passion behind it, either his own or his creator's; it offers Americans something very pretty, something they seldom do and hence love to see done; and it seemed, in *Allegro*, about as morally impressive as most high deeds of operetta. *Allegro* may not carry much conviction, but it does have earnestness, an earnestness bordering on solemnity. Even the jokes are made a little timidly, the way people make them coming home from a funeral.

• • •

To be sure, everything looks nice; the chorus sings well; John Battles is a likeable Joe Taylor; and in most ways—though not always in its acting—*Allegro* is very professional. And no doubt Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein were as concerned here with really doing something different as in their previous and delightful *Carousel*. Perhaps their greatest miscalculation lay in attempting something "simple," for there is nothing, considered as a *project*, more difficult. To pull it off, usually you have to be simple yourself, or a genius; simplicity is like a soft-boiled egg or playing a Mozart sonata—you can't doctor it up, it's either right or it's wrong.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York Post

OCTOBER 11, 1947.

Hammerstein-Rodgers' 'Allegro' Third Hit of Unusual Week

By Richard Watts Jr.

The season's sensational succession of hits continued at the Majestic Theatre last night, making it three for the week and five for the fortnight. The occasion, of course, was the arrival of the much heralded "Allegro," latest work of the triumphant Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, and the most strenuously anticipated musical show of the post-war era. Indeed, "Allegro" has been the cause of so much speculation and prediction, with everything about it discussed, from the expensiveness of its production to the ambitiousness of its intentions, that the skeptical doubted if it could live up to it all.

Now that it has opened with fanfare and flourishes, it can be reported that it has overcome the handicap of its premature fame and is revealed as a distinguished musical play, beautiful, imaginative, original and honestly moving. I have certain reservations about it which will be discussed later, but there is no disputing the fact that it is a notable achievement in its field and another landmark in pushing back the frontier of the American music drama.

Simplicity

I think the most impressive thing about it is that, despite its size, costliness and lavish use of the stage's resources from treadmills and lantern slides to ballets and musical Greek choruses, "Allegro" retains a kind of pure simplicity in its story telling. It is merely the biography, from the cradle to the break-up of his marriage, of a boy who wanted to be a small-town doctor, was sidetracked by the ambitions of his wife to make him a success in the city, but, in the end, rebelled, went off with the nurse who loved him, and settled down as the modest general practitioner his father had been.

There is no more to it than that, and it sticks to what it has to say with straightforwardness and integrity. There is no attempt to whip up the plot or to go in for side issues, and even the element of comedy is confined to that which fits naturally into the young man's life or satirizes the problems besetting him. The result is an emotional honesty that brightens the music, the lyrics and the dancing as they go about the business of carrying on the story to its logical conclusion. Although Mr. Rodgers' music, Mr. Hammerstein's lyrics and Miss de Mille's ballets are splendid, they are always more concerned with keeping to the mood of the narrative than with being flashy or sensational on their own account.

I have already reported reservations. The first act, for one thing, is considerably more effective than the second, because the boy's adventures in childhood, college and courtship are more interesting than his disillusionment with life in the big city. In addition, I confess I am always made uncomfortable by scenes in which metropolitan authors pretend that they find all the virtues in small towns and only vice and decadence in cities. I have never believed this myself and I doubt if they do. It strikes me, too, that Mr. Rodgers, in the interest of the purity of his music, has been a little afraid of getting a really tuneful song into his skillful score, falling back on his wonderful "Mountain Greenery" from "The Garrick Gaieties" in the one scene in which such a song is needed.

These, however, are minor reservations in the face of the work's virtues. Among these is a well-chosen cast that manages story, singing and dancing properly. John Battles as the young doctor, Roberta Jonay as the wife who turns villainess in the second act, John Conte as the gay but loyal friend, Annamary Dickey and William Ching as the parents, and Lisa Kirk as the faithful nurse are just right for their roles, while Kathryn Lee's humorous ballet work and Gloria Wills' amusing bit as an amorous girl who is sadly disappointed by the shy hero help out greatly. As usual, Jo Mielziner's sets are ingenious and in the proper mood and Lucinda Ballard's costumes are colorful and gay.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 11, 1947

'Allegro' Hasn't Tempo of Title

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The highly touted musical "Allegro" is a vast disappointment. The early conception of the work has a worthy beauty, but its realization crosses the stage like an impoverished sophomore class production.

It lacks consistency of mood, visual excitement and theatrical stimulation.

"Allegro" sets out to tell of a simple man's success, first worldly, then inwardly contented. It sings about the pull of phony riches against honest satisfaction.

Ballet, choir and ghostly voices clarify the forces that make a young doctor desert a lucrative practice for the integrity of service in his calling.

The progress of the show sees the original conception blotted out by unimaginative tricks. In the end it seems like the creation of a pretentious passe costumer who has nothing but cambric to work with.

No Standout Performer.

At the start a boy is born. Here the stereopticon images and the chorus voicing the parents' dreams and emotions are deeply moving. When he later marries, there is again a clarity about this comment. In between, and after the wedding, the story and its presentation are entirely lacking in exhilaration.

The Dr. Kildare narrative is painfully obvious. The mood of mixed imagination and reality is muddled, and there is never any visual substitution for the early twilight drabness.

Dancing Assemble Lively.

This treatment of ordinary people should be most interesting. Here the producers seem to have leaned over backward to avoid casting anyone of distinction in the musical.

Except in rare cases, the cast of "Allegro" is simply colorless.

Except for Annamary Dickey and Muriel O'Malley, the musicianship, audibility and enunciation of the principals is amteurish by comparison to the talents of the chorus.

Of the entire cast no one reveals such authority and clean performing as Kathryn Lee, dancing with fire and imagination. The dancing ensemble is lively, but Agnes de Mille's choreography has no very interesting departures from what she has done in the past.

William Ching is a pleasing father of the ambitious young doctor, and Gloria Wills sings her one number effectively, if entirely out of the character she has just previously been at some pains to create.

Some Good Melodies.

Several numbers from the score have already proven themselves to the popular taste. "So Far," "The Gentleman Is a Dope" and "Come Home" will undoubtedly be heard frequently, and there are a couple of other melodies which could easily equal their success.

The conception of the title number as sung and danced is indicative of the show's vagaries. It depicts the sort of frantic social life that was illustrated more effectively some years ago to Noel Coward's "Dance, Little Lady." These days it strikes a note of wastrel decadence that not many of us are privileged to encounter.

Journal American

OCTOBER 11, 1947

Musical Play Belies Its Title

By ROBERT GARLAND

To the Messrs. Funk and Wagnalls, publishers of "The Standard Dictionary," "allegro" means "brisk," "lively" and even downright "gay." But to the Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein, collaborators on The Theatre Guild's first production of the season, the word means nothing of the kind.

They, brighter than your reporter, seem to have confused "allegro" with, say, "lento," which means "slow," unhurried" and even downright "serious." For the co-authors of "Oklahoma," still in New York, and "Carousel," now on the road, have turned out a serious "play with music."

Last night, their "Allegro" went its slow, unhurried way, telling, with the aid of moving platforms, traveling curtains, lantern slides, Greek choruses, loud speakers, a huge company of actors, singers and dancers, and a symphony sized orchestra, a simple run-of-the-U. S. A. biography . . .

It's as if the story of Dr. Foster, who went to Gloucester, were blown up out of Mother Goose and into the Metropolitan Opera House.

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In Modern Clothes

Come to think of it, the young Dr. Taylor of "Allegro" really is our friend Dr. Foster of "Mother Goose" in 20th Century dress. Only young Dr. Taylor goes to Chicago. There, however, he does fall in a puddle up to his middle and, like his predecessor, never goes there again.

In "Allegro" you meet young Dr. Taylor at the moment of his birth, with a Greek chorus, a loud-speaker and some lantern-slides filling in the details. After college, he moves on to the American counterpart of Gloucester, where he meets with his mishap, returning afterward to his own home town.

There are two loves in young Dr. Taylor's life. The first leads him on to Gloucester. The second leads him home again. There, at the age of thirty-five, he follows his father's footsteps, with his mother and his grandmother, who are dead, and his father, who isn't, looking proudly on.

It's as simple as that, the story of "Allegro." At the Majestic, it suffers from over elaboration in its many-faceted telling.

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Tunes Are Lilting

What I mean is that too little has been spared to make "Allegro" a production milestone in the American showshop. The could-be heartening narrative of a small town medico who goes to the big town and sees the error of his ways is all but lost in the contrivance of its projection.

It's an exciting enough projection. But, as a play with music, it's at its winning best when the machinery has slowed down and the shrewdly selected cast is singing Richard Rodgers' more musical-comedy-minded tunes. "A Fellow Needs A Girl," "So Far" and the lilting one whose name I don't remember.

Or when Agnes de Mille's lusty dancers fill every level of the Majestic's stage with their youth, skill and true de-Millelian dexterity. Then, to the accompaniment of Salvatore Dell'Isola's excellent orchestra, "Allegro" is actually "allegro," instead of "lento"...

Don't get me wrong. "Allegro" is bigger than anything the Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein have written. But I do wish it had more consistently lived up to its title.

"High Button Shoes"

PM

OCTOBER 12, 1947

Kronenberger

It May Have Its Faults But It's Certainly Fun

For a musical that's not very good, *High Button Shoes* is a very good musical indeed. Some of it is wonderful, much of it is gay, and the rest has the merit of being bad without being boring. It's an upsy-downsy evening, but certainly as much sky as swamp; and if you'll frankly accept it for better or worse, I think you'll enjoy yourself. I did. I've seen shows with twice as much class that weren't half as much fun.

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Delving into the past, as has every show this week, *High Button Shoes* turns up in New Brunswick, N. J., in 1913. Thither comes Phil Silvers as a rather harassed conman; and there he and his stooge, Joey Faye, start some spar gled real-estate operations that implicate one of the most respected families in the town. Since Rutgers is also in New Brunswick, Rutgers is also in the show—as a place where football is played and romance is popular.

• • •

An amiably uninspired book provides Mr. Silvers, who can be a very funny fellow, with about an equal number of opportunities and obstacles. When the book is doing right by him, Mr. Silvers is a riot; and when it isn't, Mr. Silvers—like most of his brethren in the business—sweats to little avail. Joey Faye, I fear spends most of the evening as merely a likeable tag-along; but on the other hand Nanette Fabray, who has always been entitled to get by on her looks alone, emerges in *High Button Shoes* as a real and thoroughly vivacious personality, of great use in song, dance and story. She is one reason why the show so often is gay.

• • •

But Jerome Robbins is the reason why the show at its best is wonderful. He has created a Mack Sennett ballet, a period fandango of bathing beauties and Atlantic City bath-houses, of Keystone cops and robbers and all the rest, which as it keeps gaining in speed and growing in size and gyrating in all directions, becomes one of the comic glories of the age. Mr. Robbins has a hand in the show's No. 2 exhibit as well, a delightful song-and-dance number called *Papa, Won't You Dance With Me?* wherein Miss Fabray and Jack McCauley do some fine period whirling.

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Beyond this show-stopper, Mr. Styne's score is pleasantly unsensational—or somewhat better than Mr. Cahn's lyrics, which are agreeably third-rate. But Mr. Abbott has staged the proceedings with a tonic and cheerful air, and the cast works as though it likes what it is doing. What I think *High Button Shoes* most needed was more time, rather than more talent; some things in it are straight-out lousy, but others look as if they just weren't allowed to come to a boil. If they had been ——; but the show's worth seeing, as it stands, for what Mr. Robbins has to offer alone.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

'HIGH BUTTON SHOES.'

HIGH BUTTON SHOES, a musical comedy, book by Stephen Longstreet, based on his novel, "The Sisters Liked Them Handsome." Music and lyrics by Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn. Scenery by Oliver Smith; costumes, Miles White; lighting, Peggy Clark; orchestrations, Philip Lang; musical direction, Milton Rosenstock; vocal arrangements, Bob Martin; dances and staging, Jerome Robbins; production directed by George Abbott; produced by Monte Proser and Joseph Kipness. At the Century Theatre.

Harrison Flor	Phil Silvers
Mr. Pontdue	Joey Faye
Uncle Willie	Paul Godkin
Henry Longstreet	Jack McCauley
General Longstreet	Clay Clement
Stevie Longstreet	Johnny Stewart
Fran	Lois Lee
Sara Longstreet	Nanette Fabray
Nancy	Helen Gallagher
Hubert Oglethorpe	Mark Dawson
Shirley Simpkins	Carole Coleman
Elmer Simpkins	Nathaniel Frey
Elmer Simpkins Jr.	Donald Harris
Coach	Tom Clemmon
Mr. Anderson	William David
A Boy at the Picnic	Arthur Partington
His Playmate	Sondra Lee
A Popular Girl	Jacqueline Dodge
A Betting Man	George Spelvin
Another Betting Man	Howard Lenters

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. Kokomo and Points East. Scene 2. Living room of the Longstreet House, New Brunswick, N. J. Early Autumn, 1913. Scene 3. Redmond Street. Scene 4. Near the Stadium. Scene 5. The Longstreet Living room. Scene 6. Road to the Picnic. Scene 7. "Longstreetville." ACT II. Scene 1. Atlantic City—the Bathhouses. Scene 2. The Beach. Scene 3. The Bathhouses. Scene 4. Redmond Street, New Brunswick. Scene 5. The Longstreet Living room. Scene 6. The Road. Scene 7. The Stadium. Scene 8. The Longstreet Garden.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 16, 1947

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Pitchmen on Their Uppers

A GENERAL exuberance pervades "High Button Shoes" which is likely to make theatergoers tolerate its deficiencies. Jule Styne has written a lilting score for the new musical comedy at the Century; Jerome Robbins has arranged some brilliant choreographic satire, and Stephen Longstreet, in his libretto, has underlined the piece with nostalgic notations on a vanished era. This Monte Proser-Joseph Kipness production has a lot of bounce. The trouble is that the ball is extremely elusive. In the hands of Nanette Fabray, Mark Dawson, Jack McCauley and Lois Lee, it is kept in exciting motion. Phil Silvers and Joey Faye, who should have dominated the proceedings, frequently fumble.

* * *

Somewhere along the perilous line of song-and-dance confection, "High Button Shoes" has settled for being both a vintage period musical and a conglomeration of night-club antics. When the offering is sticking to its period of 1913, with a con man invading the stilted suburban atmosphere of New Brunswick, luring a very aware maiden to Atlantic City, or trying to recoup his failing fortunes on a Rutgers-Princeton football game, the show has color and musical-comedy excitement. When it is lampooning the extravagances of Mack Sennett in a ballet, it is genuinely funny. For much of the time it lags.

* * *

More simplicity would have become "High Button Shoes." Under George Abbott's direction it has a certain professional pace, but it never hangs together properly. Such a number as "There's Nothing Like a Model T" or "I Still Get Jealous" deserved a more rigorous mise-en-scene than you will find at the Century. Silvers is very good when he is making his various pitches from Kokomo to New Brunswick, but both he and Faye are guilty of atrocious taste in consenting to sing "You're My Boy." The truth is that there is no great performer to keep a hodge-podge of recollection and burlesque tightly knit in "High Button Shoes." It has definitely rewarding moments, but they are interrupted by devious vaudeville manipulations.

* * *

The benisons of the show are more incidental than integral. Robbins has mounted an uproarious bit of dance miming in his take-off on early films. He has guided Helen Gallagher and Paul Godkin through a fetching tango and Miss Fabray, McCauley and what are known as the boys and girls through an enchanting number called "Papa, Won't You Dance With Me?" The Styne music is much better, though, than the Sammy Cahn lyrics with which it is coupled. Oliver Smith's settings and the Miles White costumes are worthy of a musical comedy triumph. "High Button Shoes" is scarcely that.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 16, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Eschewing progress in the arts for the moment, the producers of "High Button Shoes" have put together a very happy musical show in a very cheerful tradition. With Phil Silvers skipping through it like an old burlesque mountebank, it was acted at the Century last evening, much to the pleasure of a relaxing audience.

Since George Abbott has staged it, you must expect the Rutgers to play the Princetons at least once during the evening to the grave tune of a college anthem. But Mr. Abbott does not mean it this time. For "High Button Shoes" is an immensely likable musical show in a vein that was equally funny but much less splendid on the old Columbia wheel. Put it down as excellent family entertainment with no pretentions to show-shop aesthesia.

* * *

Phil Silvers is an uproarious comic. He has the speed, the drollery and the shell-game style of a honky-tonk buffoon. Fortunately, he has the shifty assistance here of Joey Faye, who also wears the school-tie of the burlesque academies. Cast as a pair of vagrant fakers, they put a lot of low comedy into "High Button Shoes," placing the laughs down in the abdomen, which has not had much exercise in our theatre lately.

As scribbler of the book, Stephen Longstreet has written a sentimentally amusing fable about life in New Brunswick, N. J., in 1913. Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn have equipped it with music and lyrics that are simple in style and very pleasant to hear, like a well-oiled hurdy-gurdy. With the greatest of ease the authors whisk you into a Texas love song, an episode with a Ford car and an incident involving the lady-bird watchers in the woods of New Brunswick.

* * *

Although Jerome Robbins has not designed any ballet numbers that will get into the textbooks, he has admirably expressed the joyous mood of "High Button Shoes" in a brief cartoon of the pre-war tango, in a holiday skipping dance to a picnic scene and a hilarious Mack Sennett ballet in the second act. It is a combination of old burlesque routines and modern ballet techniques. Swift and insane, like a jiggly old film, it is an inspired bit of animated entertainment.

In one of his most affable moods, Mr. Abbott has chosen an agreeable cast and staged a lively performance. Nanette Fabray sings the principal songs with a good voice and in a jaunty manner. For masculine romance you can count on Mark Dawson, whose voice is deep and whose earnestness is not too solemn. As the paternal side of "Papa, Won't You Dance With Me," Jack McCauley made a lot of new friends last evening. Lois Lee is in high spirits as the nubile New Brunswickian, and can probably sing better than this off-hand gambol requires.

Oliver Smith has laced up "High Button Shoes" with some gay settings, and Miles White has dressed the performance in agreeable pastel costumes. For workaday musical entertainment you can hardly do better at the moment than this modern variation on an old knock-about theme. You don't have to be a college graduate to enjoy it.

The Sun

OCTOBER 16, 1947

'High Button Shoes' Lively, Good-natured Show, Presented at the Century.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The time is 1913 and the locale the fabulous State of New Jersey for the brisk, good-natured musical comedy called "High Button Shoes," which gives its attention to the Model T, the tango, Mack Sennett bathing beauties, college football and the get-rich-quick operations of a con man named Harrison Floy. The first performance was given last night at the Century.

"High Button Shoes" is an unpretentious and likable song and dance show. It has some nice tunes—a real hit in "Papa, Won't You Dance With Me?"—a wonderful Mack Sennett ballet, put on by Jerome Robbins; a zestful performer in Nanette Fabray and a good comedian in Phil Silvers. The Sennett number, which brings on the Keystone cops and reminders of a glorious era in the history of the silent screen, gets the second half of the show off to a brisk start.

Stephen Longstreet's book is a serviceable one. George Abbott's direction has given the show a lot of pace. Miles White has supplied bright costumes and Oliver Smith has contributed excellent settings. And the opening night found Nanette Fabray in the best form of her career. Miss Fabray, playing a mama at a tender age, sings, dances and whistles, and she has developed into something of a comedienne. She and Jack McCauley, who also outdoes himself in all departments, stop the show with "Papa, Won't You Dance With Me?" Other pleasant songs from Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn are "Bird Watcher's Song," "I Still Get Jealous" and "Get Away for a Day in the Country."

All of which brings us to the case of Silvers, a nimble, deadpan mountebank, who sells snake oil, phony jewelry, land that is under water and bets on collegiate football. He is a comedian combining something of the qualities of Ted Healey, Ed Wynn and J. Rufus Wallingford. His most hilarious scene comes along when he mingles with the Rutgers football squad between halves in the game with Princeton. He has bet on Princeton, which is losing 40 to 0, so he goes about trying to maim, cripple and mutilate the entire home team. Eventually, Silvers's real estate pays off, as did Wallingford's covered carpet tacks of distant memory.

The undersized Joey Faye is an amusing stooge for Silvers. Lois Lee is agreeably present. Mark Dawson looks and acts the role of a halfback and Helen Gallagher and Paul Godkin do a good tango.

"High Button Shoes" is a sprightly and exuberant show and it will give you a pleasant evening. I liked a lot of it.

New York Post

OCTOBER 10, 1947

Period Musical Show Bright and Lively

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

This pleasant drama season continued to be bright and lively last night, when a new musical show called "High Button Shoes" opened at the Century Theatre. In the fashion of the year, it is a period piece, based on Stephen Longstreet's reminiscences of family life in New Brunswick, N. J., in 1913, and, although there is little to cheer about in the book and the music frequently sounds derivative, there is enough good nature, humor and imagination in the production to make it an agreeable and successful addition to the town's gayety.

As one who has never been particularly hospitable to the ballet in musical comedy, I hasten to report that the hero of the evening is Jerome Robbins, who staged the dances. There is more humor and unconventional inventiveness and less stuffiness in Mr. Robbins than in most directors of the pirouette, and all of the dancing in "High Button Shoes" is agreeable. There is one number, however, that is a genuine masterpiece, a wild and hilarious affair in which everyone, including the principals of the cast, darts about frantically in the fashion of the treasured Keystone comedies of silent film days, meanwhile carrying on the plot furiously. It is a delightful burlesque which would give distinction to a less entertaining show than "High Button Shoes."

Hitherto Unknown

With all appreciation of Mr. Robbins' distinguished work, there is another important contributor to the excellence of the new show's dancing. A young dancer, hitherto unknown to me, named Helen Gallagher, a slender and interesting girl, reveals an individuality and style which make her, in a small part, the most arresting player in the show. I recommend her to you particularly in a delightful tango she does with Paul Godkin.

As for Phil Silvers, the chief comic, I admit that he conquered me after a hard battle. Playing a fugitive pitchman who swindles the Longstreets while continuing to fascinate them, he seemed to me at first just another synthetic clown. Slowly and somewhat grudgingly, I began to break down under his tireless battering and started accepting him. Then, by the time the second act was under way I recognized that, when he got going, he was a truly funny fellow, and I salute him as a comedian in the authentic tradition. He is, by the way, greatly helped by the slyly innocent comedy of Joey Faye.

Other Principals

Among the remaining principals, it is my impression that the most helpful contribution is made by Jack McCauley, as the father of the family. Mr. McCauley has been in a lot of musical shows for a number of years without seeming more than an adequate performer, but in "High Button Shoes" he suddenly emerges as an actor of warmth and charm, in addition to handling his two best song numbers engagingly. Opposite him is Nanette Fabray, an able young musical actress who has many admirers more ardent than this observer.

Although, as I have said, the score by Jule Style and Sammy Kahn is filled with musical reminiscences, it is lively and has one haunting song called "Papa, Won't Dance With Me?" which deserves the popular success it is certain to have. Oliver Smith's sets and Myle White's costumes are properly colorful without being distinguished. "High Button Shoes" should be the first musical comedy hit of the season.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 10, 1947

'High Button Shoes' Doesn't Add Up

By ROBERT COLEMAN

It is amazing how adroitly Stephen Longstreet writes for the printed page and how ineptly for the stage. Longstreet's short stories about his grandfather, which appeared in Gourmet, were masterpieces of nostalgic charm.

But in transferring the Longstreet family from the magazine to a musical comedy, "High Button Shoes," the writer has come a cropper. Poor Grandpa almost gets lost in the shuffle and about the only member of the tribe who comes to life is Mother Longstreet.

This is because Nanette Fabray gives the best performance of her life, a performance of authority, skill, warmth and enchantment. This nice musical comedy leading lady has suddenly been transformed into a delightful personality, a resourceful artist.

Comedian Phil Silvers is not so lucky. Handicapped by mediocre material and a bad throat, he flounders valiantly through the evening at the Century trying to make a stereotyped combo pitchman-conman amusing.

It was a part that cried for the vitality of Bobby Clark, the genius who doesn't require material to be hilarious. All he needs is a stage and an audience.

Miss Fabray is not alone in scoring a personal triumph. So, too, does Jerome Robbins, with some of the most enjoyable choreography to grace a song-and-dancer in many semesters. We liked best his first act ballet, but the first nighters appeared to prefer his second-act satire on the Keystone Comedy Cops. The latter is a gem of action. It had the customers bursting with enthusiam and cheering wildly.

The score by Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn is reminiscent. They are fortunate in having the magnetic Fabray and a pleasing George Abbott chorus to spark their uninspired songs.

Jack Macauley, Mark Dawson and Lois Lee also lend la Fabray expert assistance. Dawson and Miss Lee have excellent musical comedy voices.

Director George Abbott and choreographer Robbins have done first rate jobs in concealing the deficiencies of "High Button Shoes."

Though "High Button Shoes" has some wonderful episodes, it doesn't add up to a solid sender for producers Monte Proser and Joseph Kipness.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 10, 1947

Uproarious Mack Sennett Ballet High Spot of 'High Button Shoes'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Even without the Mack Sennett ballet "High Button Shoes" would be a very pleasant musical; with the ballet it becomes something special—a happy romp for people who just want to see a show without getting all cluttered up with art.

"High Button Shoes" opened last evening at the Century Theatre. By the end of the first act Phil Silvers, as slick a con man as ever stole a gag, had absconded from New Brunswick, N. J., with a lot of money and a girl and had gone, as has many another gent in similar company, to Atlantic City.

Here, on the beach, the second act began, with the law on Silvers' trail. The pursuit had the first-nighters almost paralyzed with delight, for Jerome Robbins, who can be a very tony choregrapher when he wishes, has staged a hilarious melee involving the Keystone Komedy Kops, Gloria Swanson and the rest of the Sennett bathing beauties, life guards, a horrifying trio of crooks, an ape and, of course, Silvers and his mournful stooge, Joey Faye.

The Rest Is Amiable.

I don't know how Robbins ever managed to get so many people to do so many crazy things—all of them right out of those wonderful Sennett one-reelers—without getting hurt or in each other's way. But he does it, and the ballet is a masterpiece.

The rest of "High Button Shoes" is not so socko—fortunately, I guess, for nobody could stand the strain if it were—but it is a very amiable affair, and with Miles White costumes and Oliver Smith settings it is notably handsome.

The book is based on a Stephen Longstreet book, "The Sisters Liked Them Handsome," which is about the Longstreet home in New Brunswick when Stephen was a kid, back in the hobble-skirt era of 1913. In the musical version Mr. Silvers is a pitchman and Mr. Faye is his shill, and they move in on the Longstreets to help them sell

some real estate. There also is some college stuff, for Dear Old Rutgers is in New Brunswick—and, since there is this college stuff, George Abbott naturally is the lad who has directed the show. He has nicely preserved its good-natured qualities.

"High Button Shoes" sets a precedent for musicals by having a young and pretty prima donna, Nanette Fabray, portray a married woman—and a mother, at that. She's Mama Longstreet, and she is teamed with Jack McCauley as Papa. Together they do two of the most engaging numbers in the show, "Papa Won't You Dance With Me" and "I Still Get Jealous." The latter song has a 1913 flavor in tune and lyrics, and Mr. McCauley and Miss Fabray present it like a vaudeville duo of the period, not omitting the soft-shoe dance.

It's Robbins' Show.

Mark Dawson is good as a football hero from Texas, who tells Lois Lee in a song that next to Texas he loves her. Mr. Silvers is amusing all the way through (and, happy day, he keeps it clean); his lecture to a ladies' bird-watching club is instructive. Mr. Faye manages to work in his sneezing routine once more, and as always I fall for it like a helpless idiot.

Night before last we had David Ffolkes dressing up the folks in "Man and Superman" in 1905 clothing. Last night Mr. White brought us down to the eve of World War II. So fashions in show business are progressing while those on Fifth Avenue are marching backward.

Jule Styne's music and Sammy Cahn's lyrics are good enough, but it is Jerome Robbins who cops the evening. Not only with the Sennett number, but also with a tango, a picnic scene and other numbers freshly conceived and attractively danced.

Journal American

OCTOBER 16, 1947

The Musical Needs A Pulling Together

By ROBERT GARLAND

There's a new musical at the Century and it needs coordinating. Not even George Abbott has bothered to pull the piece together. And it's a pity! For there's so much good in the best of it, and so much bad in the worst of it, that the good should have been treasured.

"High Button Shoes" is the little-girl-who-had-a-little-curl among musicals. When it's good, its very good with Nanette Fabray as its star, Mark Dawson as its hero, "Papa Won't You Dance With Me" as its song hit and a goofy Mack Sennett ballet as its high-spot.

But when it's bad, it's very unattractive with Phil Silvers as its comedian, Joey Faye as his stooge, "You're My Boy" as their low-spot and Stephen Longstreet's libretto as its ultimate confusion. This libretto is "The Sisters Liked Them Handsome" in double-talk.

It's witty, though! "How's crops?" Silvers inquires of Faye. "Oh," Faye replied, "I haven't shot crops for a long time!"

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Curious Kissing Scene

This gives you some idea of the funny business that goes on between Phil Silvers as Harrison Floy and Joey Faye as Mr. Pontdue. There's more of it, too, including a curious kissing scene to the tune of "You're My Boy" right down beneath the Princeton-Rutgers Stadium.

How that stadium gets itself into Stephen Longstreet's libretto you'll not learn from me. But it's there, all right, with old General Longstreet moping about the Civil War, young Halfback Oggiethorpe bringing love to New Brunswick and a Model T Ford adding 1913 atmosphere.

Frankly, "High Button Shoes" is like nothing so much as a straight play being rehearsed in a night club while the floor show's going on. Almost anything can happen. Practically everything does. Some of it is right. Some of it is wrong. Some of it just isn't.

For this Monte Proser-Joseph Kipness offering is a good show gone wrong, a wrong show gone good and a fascinating example of hit-or-miss show business.

• • •

Nanette's Lovely

Nanette Fabray's the lovely leading lady who, last season at the Shubert, took over the outstanding hoop skirts of "Bloomer Girl." At the Century she sings songs about security, bird-watching and getting jealous. But it's her "Papa, Won't You Dance With Me" you'll cherish.

Mark Dawson, out of the Marines into "Sweethearts," out of "Sweethearts" into "High Button Shoes," sings "Can't You See Yourself in Love With Me?", "You're My Girl" and "Next to Texas, I Love You." A personable hero, he's madly in love with someone, but I can't remember who.

Among the other very good things—and I mention them as haphazardly as they come—are Oliver Smith's settings, Miles White's costumes, some of the Jule Styne-Sammy Cahn songs and most of the Jerome Robbins dances. Especially that beautifully batty Mack Sennett ballet.

Add coordination, subtract comedians, and "High Button Shoes" will be a whole lot better than it is. The stuff's there, but dissipated.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 16, 1947

'High Button Shoes' Is Glorious Nonsense

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The delights of "High Button Shoes" are in fascinating contrast. They range from the simplest nostalgic duet to one of the most frantic comic ballets ever seen on the stage.

When the whole thing is over the high lights have been so warm and so funny that it is hard to remember what went on between them. It is a Jerome Robbins night, for it is his dances that provide most of the peaks.

Phil Silvers Lacks Material.

This is the tale of a confidence man let loose in New Jersey in 1913. He invades the placid Longstreet home in New Brunswick and organizes a real estate boom on the family's marsh land. Decamping with the money, he is chased to Atlantic City in a rip-roaring climax. Everything is saved when the mud begins to sell to beauty shops.

Phil Silvers, who is starred, seems to be working with special material that is none too good and has little to do with the rest of the show. Through no particular fault of his own, he ends up being just about as important to the proceedings as the book, and no more.

It is Nanette Fabray who garners most of the individual performing honors for herself. Gentler than in her last appearance in "Bloomer Girl," she still has vitality and a wicked humor. She sings and she dances and she brings the house down with impromptu bird calls.

With a great deal of talent on the stage, the biggest star still goes to Robbins.

Glorious Nonsense.

The big second-act chase turns into a Mack Sennett two-reeler with a wealth of glorious nonsense. The bathing beauties chill their toes in the waves and skitter about in the most outrageously girlish pantomime. The seedy cops fly trembling into the air at the slightest surprise, and the depraved villains look as if they had crawled out from under an ancient sun dial.

The ballet is done at terrific speed and piles on its laughs. One day with a little pruning it definitely should be put in the repertoire of the Ballet Theater.

A number called "Jealous" is tastefully staged like a vaudeville act "in one." Miss Fabray and Jack McCauley sing it and go into a politely humorous soft-shoe that treats the memory of the two-a-day with all respect.

Earlier in the evening, out of nowhere in particular, comes a sardonic tango danced fiercely by Helen Gallagher and Paul Godkin. Gritting their teeth to learn this "new" dance by mail, the pair stops just this side of an Apache routine.

Eager Lyrics.

A really charming incident is the polka danced with verve by Fabray and McCauley, and the "Bird Watcher's Song" with its eager lyrics and clothes makes a further brightly comic moment. It is following this that Silvers has his best moment. When he lectures the ladies' club he cannot help falling into his carnival spiel.

Many of the songs are so delightfully of the period they might have been plucked out of a library collected before the first war. The ballads are delivered with healthy vibrancy by Lois Lee and Mark Dawson.

Joey Faye, who can be a touching comic, is pretty much lost in the rush. Like a Rutgers-Princeton football game that is said to be going on offstage, he turns up and fades away without being allowed to make much impression.

"Man and Superman"

Journal-American

OCTOBER 9, 1947

Brilliant Revival With Maurice Evans

By ROBERT GARLAND

Now, at the Alvin, everything's for the best in the best of all theatre worlds. A brilliant comedy, Bernard Shaw's "Man and Superman." A brilliant performance, Maurice Evans' John Tanner. And a brilliant reproduction of the "Don Juan play" the greatest living dramatist composed almost half a century back at the suggestion of a drama critic.

Writing, from Woking two years after Maurice Evans was born, his "epistle dedicatory" to Arthur Walkley, Bernard Shaw apologized for the talky goings-on in a play which he himself called "comedy and a philosophy." But the comedy is comic. And the philosophy, after four-and-forty years of war and peace and war again, is sound.

It's amazing, but "Man and Superman" has had but one Broadway revival since its original showing in 1905. Then, Robert Lorraine and Fay Davis, Richard Bennett and Clara Bloodgood, were the boys and girls involved. In the reproduction of 1912, Mr. Lorraine set himself the task of carrying the "comedy and philosophy" practically unaided.

But, thanks to Maurice Evans and company, "Man and Superman" is its sharp Shavian self again.

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A Shocker in 1905

It's not only as good as new. It's better! Back in 1905 or thereabouts, when I first saw "Man and Superman" in Baltimore's beautiful old Academy of Music—if it happened to be Ford's Grand Opera House, don't tell me—both its comedy and its philosophy were shocking. Delightfully shocking, but shocking just the same.

Now, in New York's comparatively new Alvin, "Man and Superman" is nothing of the kind.

After almost half a century, Ann Whitefield's boa-constrictor tactics where John Tanner is concerned are taken pretty much for granted. And Violet Robinson's outspokenness in connection with her unborn child is as shockless as a bellboy.

Which is to say that Bernard Shaw's comedy-philosophy can be enjoyed for its comedy, which is keen, and its philosophy, which is keener. And, at the final curtain, the joke's on John in spite of Violet's interruption. "Never mind her, dear," says Ann, taking his arm with the pride of assured possession. "Go on talking!"

The cream of the jest, John Tanner's final "Talking!" and the "universal laughter" of his fellows.

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Brilliant Revival

When, a year or more ago in the bar of the Boston Ritz, I sat down with Maurice Evans and inquired why, when Hamlets—from full-length to GI—had run their course, he shouldn't turn to Bernard Shaw's John Tanner, I'd no idea so casual an interrogation would result in so brilliant a revival of "Man and Superman" as this.

For the revival of "Man and Superman" which Mr. Evans has produced and staged, the reproduction of Bernard Shaw's "comedy and philosophy" which Mr. Evans is acting with wholehearted and never-failing skill, is the theatre at its best and brightest. And Mr. Evans' surrounding cast is not unworthy of its Shavian material.

Frances Rowe, making her American debut as Ann, is as she should be. But no more so than Carmen Mathews as Violet. Frederick Stover's turn of the century backgrounds are impressive, along with David Ffolkes' costumes and James Melton's Franklin. So, thanks to Maurice Evans and Bernard Shaw, the English theatre can lift its head again on Broadway . . .

Which overlooks the fact that Mr. Evans is now American, that Mr. Shaw is forever Irish. Well, anyway, here's a big Broadway bravo for their "Man and Superman."

'MAN AND SUPERMAN.'

MAN AND SUPERMAN, a comedy in three acts, by George Bernard Shaw. Staged by Maurice Evans and George Schaefer; scenery designed by Frederick Stover; costumes by David Ffolkes; lighted by Mr. Schaefer; revived by Mr. Evans. At the Alvin Theatre.

Roebuck Ramsden	Malcolm Keen
Maid	Miriam Stovall
Octavius Robinson	Chester Stratton
John Tanner	Maurice Evans
Ann Whitefield	Frances Rowe
Mrs Whitefield	Josephine Brown
Miss Ramsden	Phoebe MacKay
Violet Robinson	Carmen Mathews
Henry Straker	Jack Manning
Hector Malone Jr.	Tony Bickley
Hector Malone Sr.	Victor Sutherland

SYNOPSIS: Act I—Roebuck Ramsden's study, Portland Place, London, 1905. Act II—The rose-hyard of the Whitefield residence, near Richmond. Act III—The patio of a villa in

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 9, 1947

Maurice Evans & Co. Are Super in G. B. Shaw's 'Man and Superman'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

As a woman said during last evening's first intermission at the Alvin Theatre, "Isn't it wonderful to hear good lines again!" It is indeed. The lines are Bernard Shaw's, the play is "Man and Superman" and the players are an enchantingly spirited company assembled and headed by Maurice Evans.

Mr. Shaw's 1903-model comedy is a feast for the ear—enough of a feast for the most gluttonous of aural appetites. And, for a 1903 model, it is even more sturdy and its brasswork more gleaming than the 1904 Franklin from Jimmy Melton's motor museum which is an amusing detail of some delightful settings.

"Man and Superman" was first produced in New York in 1905, two years after it was written, and was revived briefly in 1912—so it is to be surmised that very few who saw last evening's third production were familiar with the comedy except as reading matter. Most of us were making the happy discovery that Mr. Shaw's play is superbly funny and far from being a period piece.

Buzzes and Bites.

It is the Irish gadfly at his best, buzzing energetically among, and biting, such topics and institutions as predatory women, motherhood, politics, moral progress, American millionaires, the English middle class, the rise of labor and the coming dependence of man upon the automobile.

Mr. Evans is the Superman of this excellent offering in more ways than one. He is Shaw's spokesman—a young, intelligent radical whose views of women and marriage are even more upsetting than his slant on politics. He is, he thinks, a misanthrope—a superman who is as proof against feminine wiles as the cartoon character is against bullets.

As the spokesman, Mr. Evans carries a huge conversational burden with the greatest of bounce and ease. When, finally, he succumbs to a woman after a hopeless struggle, and the curtain comes down on her line, "Talk some more," one feels like echoing her plea.

Triple-Threat Maurice.

Against the advice of Shaw, who has said the actor should never attempt management, Mr. Evans has produced "Man and Superman" and has directed it. As producer he has afforded it visual charm, with the Frederick Stover settings and the quaint Gibson Girl costumes by David Ffolkes. And he has engaged an unusually able company.

As director he has made the play, which could be a talkathon in the wrong hands, an affair of lively ideas.

From England has come a lovely comedienne, Frances Rowe, to play the wily woman who gets her man. Malcolm Keen is admirably amusing as a pompous, choleric old gent, Chester Stratton is capital as a poetic young sap and Carmen Mathews has the proper high-comedy style as a young English-woman who is practical-minded enough to wed a rich young American. Another delightful portrait is offered by Josephine Brown in the role of a mother whom life has passed by and who resents it.

This new production of "Man and Superman" has been carefully and affectionately made down to the smallest detail. Everything about it and all the people in it seem right. It always is wonderful to see good theatre such as this.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 9, 1947

Maurice Evans Opens His Season With Shaw's 'Man and Superman,' Aided by Well-Cast Company

By BROOKS ATKINSON

By the simple device of dipping back a half century in dramatic literature, Maurice Evans has given the season its first crackle of brilliance. He has come up with Bernard Shaw's "Man and Superman," which has been dozing on the shelf all these years, and he has had the good taste to put it on at the Alvin last evening.

Almost no one in his right mind likes to listen to two and a half hours of uninterrupted conversation, particularly if it is continuously witty. But Mr. Shaw and Mr. Evans have put every theatregoer under bond to submit to "Man and Superman" this season. For it is vastly entertaining in its anti-romantic attitude toward mating. And Mr. Evans, abetted by an excellent company, is giving it a capital performance.

* * *

Although Mr. Shaw's manner is iconoclastic, he probably means what he says. He is arguing that women are the aggressors in campaigns for marriage, and that the life force, which has a horrible sanitary sound, is more impetuous than romance. As usual, Mr. Shaw is looking behind the tribal customs of civilized people into the universal forces that govern them.

Rather than bore you with a scientific lecture, he has invented a garrulous and shameless person who serves as the quarry in the marriage hunt of the play. The person is John Tanner, a character Mr. Shaw probably invented by looking into the mirror. A frightful intellectual who talks like an inspired textbook, takes the unpopular side of every argument and throws off bright tags of socialism in the most conservative places, Tanner is the man who knows all about the fraud of marriage but finds himself caught fast in the last act. "Go on talking, John," his fiancée smugly advises just as the curtain comes down. For she knows that talk may sound big but she is the victor.

* * *

This jungle chase in fashionable clothing could be stupefying in a perfunctory performance, for after all, the talk does run on and on. But Mr. Evans has staged it as meticulously as if he were preparing a classic—giving the comedy projection, giving the lines a little sculpture to set off the wit and polish the humor. Although the performance is not stylized like the Gielgud "Importance of Being Earnest," it is gay, dry and sunny and a good deal more radiant than life.

Take Malcolm Keen's Roebuck Ramaden, for instance. Never was there such a choleric, sanctimonious old publican, puffing with respectability. As the triumphant female, Frances Rowe's fresh, cunning, calculating style is enchanting and mischievous simultaneously. Carmen Mathews is delightful as Violet Robinson, who ensnares her man less audaciously but cleverly enough for the purpose, and there are good performances also by Chester Stratton, Jack Manning and Josephine Brown.

* * *

As the voluble Tanner, who considerably outsmarts himself, Mr. Evans is at his best in a holiday mood. The speeches are long and the phrasing complex, but Mr. Evans keeps them refreshingly intelligible and he does not forget that "Man and Superman" is very funny stuff. To people familiar with Mr. Evans' career, there are shadows of Shakespeare chasing across the performance, particularly in the scenes between Tanner and his chauffeur. Perhaps it is only the architecture of Mr. Evans' performance which makes them seem like a Shakespearean monarch bantering words with a jester. Or perhaps this is the way Shaw conceived them. Whatever the reason, they are thoroughly enjoyable.

Although Mr. Evans has not tried to outshine nature in his production, the settings by Frederick Stover are sufficient, and the bravura costumes by David Ffolkes are splendid. After the tastelessness of most of the work this season, it is a joy to see a witty play scrupulously staged by a man who brings professional standards to the theatre. Mr. Shaw and Mr. Evans have given us the most exhilirating evening in this autumn on Broadway.

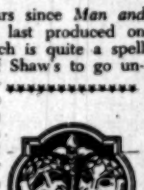
PM

OCTOBER 10, 1947

Kronenberger

Best Play on Broadway, But It Should Be Better

It is 35 years since *Man and Superman* was last produced on Broadway, which is quite a spell for anything of Shaw's to go unacted. For whatever Time may do to the Master's plays, it seldom makes the rest of Broadway any competition for them. With few exceptions, they win hands down whatever the test of merit—wisdom or wit, gaiety or audacity or individuality, or sheer knowledge of stagecraft. With few exceptions they leave us less bothered by what's wrong with them than by what's wrong with nearly everything else.



* * *

Certainly that is true of *Man and Superman*. It clearly has things wrong with it. Even with the scene in Hell omitted, it runs far too long. Even if accepted as a comedy of discussion, it becomes far too long-winded. Its central idea unfortunately achieved a fame that forever destroyed its freshness. And so on. Very plainly, *Man and Superman* is sometimes dull; very plainly it is sometimes dated.

So here and there we yawn; and we are no longer intellectually stunned by a single thing Shaw has to say. But we also laugh where we least expect to, and are never intellectually insulted by a single thing Shaw has to say. And perhaps what we tire of, as much as of anything else in the play, is its brilliance. We are literally given too much of a good thing; we are plainly getting what nobody else in the theater would be capable of giving us. We are witnessing what is still, after 40 years, a masterly extravaganza on the theme of marriage.

Allardyce Nicoll has very aptly described Shaw's peculiar form of comedy as "purposeful fun." And in Shaw's demonstration of how, despite appearances, it is woman who does the pursuing, there is plenty of fun, but purpose too; as there is in Shaw's demonstration that, however wise or wary, man can't escape his fate but must succumb to the "life force." It is all done, moreover, with a wealth of illustration, a command of stage resources and comic event by itself, it is certainly an event by comparison. It goes at the top of the list because nothing else now playing could possibly go ahead of it. Such is genius, even a genius that sometimes nods.

* * *

Such is genius, moreover, even when it's not being too well done. It would be foolish to suggest that both Maurice Evans' production and Maurice Evans' performance haven't merits, perhaps very useful merits, of a kind. They keep the play in motion; they keep the meaning clear; they do not obscure the wit. Moreover, *Man and Superman* offers hurdles to leap. As John Tanner, for example, Mr. Evans has very long speeches to deliver in a very large theater; he must often serve as Shaw's spokesman; he must sometimes talk like a book. All the same, I don't think that entitles Mr. Evans to *spout* his role the entire evening. I don't think it mere coincidence that John Tanner often sounds like Hamlet. It is Mr. Evans' achievement to make every syllable he utters register, but possibly his limitation is to give his lines the delicate modulation of the Anvil Chorus. While respecting Mr. Evans' frequent ability to charm the ear and consistent ability to hold the stage, I've never felt he went very far toward really acting Shakespeare; and now I don't feel he has gone very far toward acting Shaw. John Tanner is no doubt a good deal of a mouthpiece, but Mr. Evans never makes him anything of a man.

The production, too, is a bit slow finding its feet. In the first act, it is uncertain of pace, besides going in for a lot of period capers and flourishes rather reminiscent of Mr. Gielgud's *Importance of Being Earnest*. One had the feeling that this was done as a form of insurance, in the fear that Shaw might not be good enough for the show; with the result that the show did not seem good enough for Shaw. Things got better thereafter, but it was only in the last act that *Man and Superman* seemed to me skilfully staged. And it was only in two or two roles that it seemed to me skilfully acted. Frances Rowe's Ann Whitefield achieved that level in the third act, but perhaps only Carmen Mathews' Violet achieved that distinction throughout.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 9, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Super Revival

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S "Man and Superman," which has not been done here for thirty odd years, has been given an entrancing and eloquent revival at the Alvin Theater. To Maurice Evans must go full credit for bringing a wise and witty comedy to the attention of a new generation of theater-goers. As producer, he has framed the racing lines of the play in exquisite period backgrounds and has entrusted them to performers who know the full value of conversational conflicts. As leading man, he discloses a great talent for comic acting, which might not have been anticipated from his Shakespearian offerings, or the somber "Saint Helena." Beyond that, he has staged the work with fluency and elan.

* * *

Under his steady and imaginative guidance "Man and Superman" unfolds as one of the most delightful and provocative creations of G. B. S. Although the action is set in 1905 and some of the iconoclastic thrusts of the celebrated author are a bit dated, the piece is an utterly absorbing and satisfying comedy of manners and morals. The substance of the script, with its amusing contemplation of the marriage institution, is as pertinent today as it ever was. Shaw's incidental comments on socialism, the "new man," the differences in English and American points of view, or the persuasive power of money, are almost uncannily topical.

* * *

Following an established custom, the "Don Juan in Hell" scene has been omitted from the current offering, but that elision in no way impairs a richly satisfying entertainment. In a shrewd arrangement of three acts Evans has kept the reluctant capitulation of a rebellious hero to an assured and wily young lady in a beautifully paced crescendo of humor and human relationships. From the moment that John Tanner finds himself the unwilling co-guardian of Ann Whitefield, to his desperate automobile flight to the continent to escape his romantic fate, the work has a variety of stage movement to accompany the brilliantly profound and captivating dialogue.

* * *

Evans never forces dramatic issues, either as director or actor His Tanner is magnificent in indignation, giving the barbed Shavian remarks on society full and exciting utterance. His romantic defeat is a pleasant resolution of an extremely pleasant piece of stage craftsmanship. Frances Rowe is a perfect foil, as the queen bee, whom he likens alternately to a boa constrictor and an elephant. She has all the disarming charm that the author meant her to have. Carmen Mathews and Tony Bickley are excellent in the subsidiary romance between an English girl and the son of a Yankee millionaire, while Chester Stratton, Malcolm Keen, Josephine Brown and the others rarely miss an iffection of the play. The costumes by David Pfolkes are utterly befitting a resplendent period play and so are the sets by Frederick Stover. Maurice Evans is to be congratulated for bringing a superb comedy to vivid stage life.

New York Post

OCTOBER 9, 1947

Maurice Evans Excellent In Fine Shaw Revival

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

The third resounding hit of the season within two weeks reached town last night when Maurice Evans brought his revival of Shaw's "Man and Superman" to the Alvin Theatre. This is a comedy which, for some reason or other, hasn't been seen in this country for decades, and, on the strength of Mr. Evans' production, it is difficult to understand why. For, with our most successful Hamlet acting the leading role in top form, the way Shavian commentary on the life-force is a delight and a joy, so witty and wise, so brilliant and so fresh that it emerges as one of the Master's most enduring works.

Never having seen it acted before and not having read it for many years, I was under the absurd impression that "Man and Superman" was among its author's secondary plays, belonging with "Fygmalion," "Arms and the Man" and "The Doctor's Dilemma," rather than with "Saint Joan," "Caesar and Cleopatra" and "Candida." Now, under the spell of last night's performance, I am inclined to place it in the highest category. It is certainly garrulous, and, in the manner of triumphant pioneers, Shaw has lived to see some of his startling heresies of 1905 turned into the truisms of today. The wonderful thing about him is that it doesn't matter.

Superb Talk

The talk may go on and on, but to this day it remains superb talk, graceful, paradoxical, hilarious, vigorous and filled with wisdom. If some of the observations about men, women and the nature of morality are not as startling as they once seemed, they are always so delightfully stated that they sound just as fresh and sagacious as ever. Above all, there is so much vitality and warm humanity in all of it that "Man and Superman" gives every sign of being a deathless comedy.

There are so many reasons for finding delight in the play that it would be impossible to set down more than a few of them here. But for even the amateur Shavian one of the greatest of its joys resides in its oblique touches of autobiography. It is not merely the presentation of Shaw's passionate expression of faith in moral fervor as the mark of man's coming to adult state, or the references to the determined selfishness of the artist or any of the other avowals of creed which sound so much more personal in "Man and Superman" than in any other of the playwright's always personal works. It is in the entire spirit, with its laughter at the loquacious crusader so like Shaw, which makes it understandable why Granville Barker played the leading role with a makeup suggesting the author.

Essential Seriousness

For some odd reason, there still exists a widespread belief that the plays of Bernard Shaw, for all their wit and brilliance, are cold, bloodless and a little cynical. I now suspect that none of the comedies can do more to destroy such a viewpoint than "Man and Superman." It may laugh at sex, romance, conventional morality and other appropriate Shavian targets, but it does so in a manner to prove to any sensible listener that, while the mood may be one of mockery, the spirit is serious, warm-hearted and of the deepest morality.

Mr. Evans' production is excellent, going in for just enough stylization and period artificiality to add to the humor without making it seem burlesque, and his acting has a delightful note of mock-seriousness that is never overdone. Frances Rowe is charming as the heroine determined to get her man, Carmen Mathews is excellent as the girl who already has hers, Jack Manning has just the right touch of jaunty impertinence as the chauffeur and Malcolm Keen and the rest of the cast are of help. If Mr. Evans will soon give a performance of the famous omitted episode our gratitude will be complete.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 9, 1947

'Man and Superman' Must Be Seen

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Distinction was restored to the theatre last evening when Maurice Evans brought his revival of George Bernard Shaw's "Man and Superman" to the Alvin. This is one of Shaw's three finest plays, worthy to rank with "Saint Joan" and "Candida."

Personally, we prefer it to "Candida" and can only wonder why some manager of intelligence and taste has not presented it in recent years. Relishing hugely its wit, rapier thought and vital spirits, one can only regret that plays of such stature are no longer written.

Shaw's superman, of course, is woman. Man proposes, he says, and woman disposes. Once a woman has set her cap for a man, he might as well surrender his liberty. The smart man will realize that he is being trapped. The more obtuse will enjoy the subtlety of woman's snaring.

Sometimes man doesn't even propose. He is not given the opportunity. The woman proposes and permits the man to second the motion for the sake of public appearance. The erudite man can foresee his fate by taking to his bosom Maeterlinck's scholarly study of bees.

Shaw's dialogue crackles with incandescent humor. His characters are more real than most he fashioned. But "Man and Superman" requires brilliant, stylized acting to be truly effective. This it did not always receive last evening.

Evans, who staged the comedy with an assist from George Schafer, started it off as if it were a rollicking version of "Hamlet." He pulled out all the stops on the organ and let it roar.

But as the performance progressed brittle style crept on stage

and by the last act the spirit of Shaw was being recaptured. The play fairly cried for the graceful perfection that marked John Gielgud's revival of "The Importance of Being Earnest."

Achieving best the lightness of touch, the bouyance, the crystallization of method required were Frances Rowe and Carmen Mathews as Ann Whitefield and Violet Robinson, who pursued, won and managed their men by differing techniques.

Evans gives a robust, clear reading of cynical John Tanner; a reading that can be heard distinctly in the Alvin's last row. The Evans gesture and speech tend toward the Shakespearean. They are on the heavy side for Shaw.

Jack Manning, Chester Stratton and Malcolm Keen get all from their roles that the direction permits. Tony Bickley and Victor Sutherland seem victims of the cruder facets of staging.

However, it is easy to forgive the evening's lapses in the sheer delight of hearing Shaw's magical wordage. He dissects the human mind with the skill of a surgeon and the insight of a sage. He makes you roar pleasurably and appreciatively.

If you seek the best in modern theatre do not miss "Man and Superman." You simply cannot afford to. It will be a long time until you see its match again upon a local stage.

The Sun

OCTOBER 9, 1947

'Man and Superman' a Stimulating Comedy, Delightfully Played at the Alvin.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

George Bernard Shaw took over last night at the Alvin and everything was all right with the New York theater. His long-neglected "Man and Superman," played with sustained zest by Maurice Evans and his company as artificial comedy, provides a gay and enormously entertaining evening.

"Man and Superman" is long-winded, but generally delightfully so. It offers wit and wisdom, nonsense and absurdity, impudence and paradox as Shaw spins his tale of the losing battle that John Tanner, bachelor and intellectual, philosopher and woman-hater, garrulous disciple of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, wages against the Life Force, as represented by the other sex.

If you haven't brushed up lately on Shaw's woman-chases-man comedy, not played on Broadway since Robert Loraine's presentation in 1912, it follows the frantic Tanner in his flight from the wily Ann. Tanner has been warned by 'Enry, his Cockney chauffeur, of Ann's real intentions and he races all the way to Spain to escape her. But she pursues him, and in sunny Granada he submits to capture—and enslavemenet.

Maurice Evans, in the role of Tanner, the marked-down quarry, plays with extraordinary gusto and vitality. He is declamatory and is often consciously hammy in his tirades, delivered in tongue-in-cheek fashion. His enunciation is remarkably good and he is an actor with great respect for Shaw's text. He speaks Shaw's words so that you can hear them and enjoy them.

Evans and his company give the forty-odd-year-old "Man and Superman" a somewhat stylized treatment, as if they were playing Wilde. Frances Rowe, making her first New York appearance, is arch, airy, ornamental and completely beguiling as the relentless Ann, who had Tanner appointed in her father's will as her guardian and with one object, matrimony. Malcolm Keen is testy, choleric, pompous, explosive and very funny in the scenes when he is being baited by Tanner. Josephine Brown brings flamboyance and rare humor to the role of Mrs. Whitefield, and Chester Stratton is properly forlorn as the lovesick Octavius, the type of man, Shaw observes, who always stays clear of matrimony.

There are excellent performances from Jack Manning, as the impertinent and knowing chauffeur, Victor Sutherland, Tony Bickley and Carmen Mathews, turning in her best work in the local theater to date. Frederick Stover's within-the-budget scenery is tasteful and David Ffolkes's 1908 costumes are wonderful.

"Man and Superman," a comedy of deceptions and pretensions, and pungent observations on the sexes and the institution of matrimony, is exhilarating theater. Perhaps it will be a brighter season if we permit Shaw to write all the plays.

Now bring on "The Devil's Disciple" and "Major Barbara."

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 9, 1947

Evans Rates Accolade In 'Man and Superman'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Maurice Evans and his company are doing delightfully right by Shaw's "Man and Superman." They give it the witty and literate treatment it deserves.

Evans himself has seldom appeared to better advantage than he does as Tanner. This caustic iconoclast is habitually verbose. Cutting as he may be about other people and their ideas, he develops a sense of humor about himself only under pressure.

The most succulent meat of the play is no plot at all, but a straightforward revelation of an opinionated, progressive and independent male's succumbing to a woman's wiles. Tanner spends the large part of his time proving to everyone else how sure he is of himself.

The result is that the role must contain many protracted speeches. It is a deep pleasure to hear Mr. Evans read these lengthy lines so that every letter is distinctly audible. His control of breath lets the speeches roll with alacrity as the expressions of an impassioned thinker should.

Aligned with the domestic defeat of Tanner is another romance amusingly based on the mutual condescension of a haughty middle class English woman and a newly rich American.

Here again when all looks lost, the lady is able to fit disaster exactly into her own plans.

It is never the story as much as conflict of ideas that gives "Man and Superman" its substance. Mr. Shaw is out to prove that the power on earth is Woman's, with her need to procreate, her guile and her perfumed cunning.

With Tanner as the example, the playwright goes so far as to convincingly represent that the more a man realizes what a woman is up to, the more susceptible he is as her prey. Only the incurable romantic, the idolater of womanhood, stands a chance of sustaining bachelorhood.

Such a play is inevitably talkative. There are scenes where in the present production more physical motion would relieve the intellectual controversy. More often the expert delivery and the sense of intelligent fun with which the cast imbues the play, make absorbing entertainment.

Evans is vigorous and forceful as Tanner, letting his impatient wit devastate his adversaries. He gives the man's deflated pride a humorous extension in the final didactic speech after his fate is public property.

As the superman who outwits him with her devious charms, Frances Rowe makes a charming local debut. She is lovely to watch portraying the feminine audacity of Ann, who can neither be defended nor opposed.

Malcolm Keen is wonderfully pompous as Tanner's co-guardian of Ann. His helpless outrage at the younger man's taunts is a lusty forecast of Tanner's own later predicament.

Carmen Mathews has a wily dignity as the second lady in love, and Chester Stratton makes her romantic castoff believably indulgent.

Shorter and more direct roles are ably conveyed by Tony Bickley, Jack Manning, Josephine Brown and Victor Sutherland.

"Duet for Two Hands"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 8, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Superlative Cast

A PERIOD melodrama has had far better ministrations than it deserved at the Booth Theater. "Duet for Two Hands" is an upper-class British thriller about transplanted hands and affections in which high-blown sentiments and florid prose have been substituted for suspense and plausibility. Rarely has so much theatrical nonsense been graced with such gifted acting as that of Joyce Redman, Francis L. Sullivan and Hugh Marlowe. The Reginald Denham staging makes the most of a sway-backed script. The setting by Charles Elson is a fitting frame for surgical mumbo-jumbo and emotional upheaval, as a maimed pianist discovers that he has been given the hands of a supposed murderer. The Mary Hayley Bell play defeats all their combined efforts.

* * *

The piece played to considerable success in London two seasons ago, before Robert Reud decided to bring it to Broadway. It is difficult to suppose that it could have been more forceful or provocative then than it is in its current presentation. An alert tub-thumper has appended a program note verifying the fact that grafted thumb and finger retain the sense of touch, muscular power and prehensility, but Miss Bell has not dramatized that medical finding. She has placed her work in the Orkneys in 1904, and tips her hand on every occasion until the only excitement left in the show is the manner in which a superlative cast handles lame situations.

Miss Redman, in particular, holds an absurd blend of Victorian romanticism and scientific legerdemain in some sort of dramatic unity. As a girl who finds her former lover's strong and sensitive hands on a new lover, she gives violent overtones and emotional persuasion to a confused fable. She portrays the desperate daughter of a sinister surgeon with a simple authority that is obviously not inherent in the part. She even brings moments of moving turmoil to a drama which is forever nodding.

* * *

Sullivan, as the father who betrayed her first love, watched him go to the gallows and then sewed his hand onto another man, is not far behind her in realizing the latent possibilities of a macabre theme. Those who have seen him on the screen, most recently in "Great Expectations," will know that he has the corporeal and vocal authority for a difficult assignment. He is very good indeed in "Duet For Two Hands." So is Hugh Marlowe, who walks around in understandable confusion with the uncertain double identity which a new pair of mitts has given him. "Duet For Two Hands" might have had melodramatic grandeur, but the author stopped all that in her composition of the play.

'DUET FOR TWO HANDS.'

Play by Mary Hayley Bell; staged by Reginald Denham; setting and lighting by Charles Elson; costumes by Helene Pons; presented by Robert Reud at the Booth Theater, Tuesday evening, October 7, 1947. The cast:

Abigail Barclet ..... Joyce Redman
Herda Barclet ..... Wynne Clark
Fletty ..... Ruth Vivian
Edward Barclet ..... Francis L. Sullivan
Stephen Cass ..... Hugh Marlowe

SYNOPSIS: The action takes place in Fiersgard Castle, the Orkney's. The time is mid-summer, 1904. Act I. Scene 1: Sunset. Scene 2: Three hours later. Act II. Scene 1: The next morning. Scene 2: That night. Scene 3: Dawn, the following day.

New York Post

OCTOBER 8, 1947

English Actors Score In Mild Melodrama

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Two excellent players from London are wasted in the fair-to-middling melodrama called "Duet for Two Hands," which arrived at the Booth Theatre last night. One of them, Joyce Redman, is already known to local playgoers for her wonderfully rowdy performance as Doll Tearsheet in the Old Vic's happily remembered production of the second part of "King Henry IV," and the other, the mountainous Francis L. Sullivan, has attracted considerable attention in British motion pictures. They are by no means properly served by their current vehicle, but, whatever one may think of Mary Hayley Bell's play, their contribution to it never fails to be arresting.

It is not that "Duet for Two Hands" is a complete loss as a thriller. It is what is known as "literate," and, although its plot bears a resemblance to a famous movie story called "The Hands of Orlac," it has certain entertaining points of its own for the follower of fictional crime. The trouble is that Miss Bell has not only failed to make her melodrama exciting or plausible but has rather neglected the things which might have made it properly entertaining for those of us who deplore the failure of the theatre to supply us with good horror tales.

In brief, this is the story of a psychopathic surgeon and a young poet for whom he performs a miraculous operation. The young man had lost his hands in a mountain-climbing accident and the surgeon grafts the hands of a dead man to his wrists. The only trouble with this, it develops, is that the dead man had been hanged as a murderer, and that the surgeon's daughter, who had been in love with the alleged assassin, grows a little jittery when she finds the hands of her late beloved belonging to another man.

There is more to it, but this should be enough to give you a hint. Anyway, it is a passable story, but, as I have suggested, the author neither makes it exciting nor takes advantage of its potentialities. For one thing, although the idea that a dead man's hands could dominate the memory and activities of the person on whom they had been grafted may not be exactly persuasive, the conception that the living man might be driven to think they had such power is psychologically credible, and it would have been much better if Miss Bell had made it clear that this domination was entirely in the hero's mind.

My chief objection, though, is that she did not go into the character of the doctor more thoroughly. He is quite a fascinating gentleman, this fat, bitter, drunken, misanthropic surgeon, who is something of a genius, who hates mankind and is regarded by his colleagues of 1904 as a butcher. He is something more than the usual mad scientist of this sort of melodrama, but Miss Bell has been satisfied merely to outline the character and let Mr. Sullivan fill it in.

He does so splendidly, making the surgeon by far the most interesting character of the play, but I wish the drama had concentrated more on him and less on the romantic poet. Miss Redman, as the daughter, demonstrates again that she is a vivid, sensitive and original actress, and the others are serviceable, although Hugh Marlowe, as the poet, seems somewhat pallid in the vital company of the London visitors. The setting of the surgeon's castle in the Orkneys is helpful. But "Duet for Two Hands" is more acting than play.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 8, 1947

'Duet' Is a Dawdling Drama of Daft Folks

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

If it is no more fantastic than the rest of the play, there is one piece of information in "Duet for Two Hands" that should be of interest to impatient tipplers.

The entire cast at one point imbibes an old Viking mixture of malted milk and rum. Within five minutes they are reeling around the room demanding that someone listen to their innermost secrets.

This formula is passed on, as a suggestion or a warning, depending on the reader's susceptibility to alcohol.

Another and major thesis of the play is that if a man has another man's hands grafted on in place of his own, he will assume some of the other man's characteristics and acquire a distinct if mysterious sympathy for him.

Not Much Suspense.

Since capsule descriptions in advance have described the play with succinct completeness, there is not much mystery about it for the audience for four of the five scenes.

The plot is most carefully hinted at by the dialogue, but the only suspense lies in how long it will take certain characters to tell others what the listener already knows.

The hero has, two years before the play starts, lost his hands in a mountain climbing accident. He now falls in love with the daughter of the surgeon who miraculously made him whole.

The daughter has had a tragic romance with a murderer just two years before, which her family refuses to discuss. When the hero mentions places he has never been, and plays music he has never heard which the daughter recognizes, it is fairly certain that

everything will come out even.

Most of the inhabitants of the Orkney Island setting are fairly daft to begin with, so it is an even bet that one of them will prove mad enough to explain a good deal of what has gone on. As for the behaviour of the young man with new hands, one can only blame it on nervous strain.

The play takes an inestimable time to get going. It sidles along verbosely, with vague threats to darken its indirect exposition.

Besides lacking suspense, it lacks menace, and nothing anyone can do makes it the least bit believable. There are howling winds, screaming gulls and dim rooms. They are all rather pleasant.

One cannot help yearning for the good healthy reveille of a damsel's scream, or the bloody hand from behind a curtain of the days of "The Bat" and "The Cat and the Canary."

Instead "Duet" is muddily clinical, never quite making up its mind how seriously to take itself.

Joyce Redman has the showiest part as the wild-eyed young fisherwoman of the island. After both the bioway and the drab impersonations she did here with the Old Vic, she now turns out to be a very lovely young woman. She gives a most efficient performance, but it will not add much to her laurels.

Not Quite Sinister.

Francis L. Sullivan is the huge surgeon. His irritability seems most reasonable, and his physical placidity is more restful than sinister.

Hugh Marlowe is the distraught poetic subject of the operation, and Wynne Clark is a talkative sister of the surgeon. Ruth Vivian scurries around as a maid with a hoot mon accent.

All this activity takes place in an extraordinarily attractive room designed by Charles Elson.

The Sun

OCTOBER 8, 1947

'Duet for Two Hands' Straggling Thriller; Fine Playing From Joyce Redman.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Duet for Two Hands" is melodramatic junk. It is a diffuse and wavering thriller, one that falls off steadily as it goes along, but it serves a purpose in bringing back that startling young actress, Joyce Redman. The first performance was given last night at the Booth.

Robert Reud, a specialist in chill-and-shudder drama in recent seasons, puts on this latest London play, which was written by Mary Hayley Bell. Her story is that of a poet who lost his hands in a mountain-climbing accident. A successful operation provides him with grafted-on hands that belonged to a man who was hanged for murder.

Now bring into the action the brilliant surgeon who performed the operation, and who is definitely a monster, and the surgeon's daughter, who was in love with the executed man, and you have the material for a real thriller, but Mary Hayley Bell hasn't worked it out. Her play straggles, her characters—particularly that of the barbaric doctor—are not developed, and "Duet for Two Hands" is very flat at the finish.

It offers compensation in the fact that Joyce Redman returns from London to give a completely fascinating performance as the strange and uninhibited girl of the Orkney Island country, who has an understandable loathing for her father. Miss Redman is quick, vivid and emotional; she brings a tremulous excitement to her playing, and gives further evidence of an extraordinary talent, first revealed in this town when she appeared with the Old Vic in "Henry IV."

There is also a performance of uncommon skill from the massive Francis L. Sullivan, who plays the sadistic and unnerving Edward Sarclet, given to drink and to brooding. Sullivan, in his ugly moods, has a great deal of the menace of Sydney Greenstreet, who is also a big fellow. Hugh Marlowe brings restraint to the role of the poet, and Wynne Clark appears as the surgeon's gabby sister.

Reginald Denham has carefully directed "Duet for Two Hands," an unaccountable success in London, but no amount of directorial or acting talent can save a play that Mary Hayley Bell failed to write.

"Duet for Two Hands" is sparse melodrama, and is somewhat on the preposterous side. Joyce Redman deserves a better play and the New York and London theater should join instantly in a hearty conspiracy to get her one.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 8, 1947

A Pair of Good Actors Can't Make 'Duet for Two Hands' a Good Play

By JOHN CHAPMAN

One of the little profundities of the theatre is that not even a good actor can give a good performance in a bad play. Or even two good actors like Francis L. Sullivan and Joyce Redman, who came over from Britain to the Booth Theatre last evening to appear in "Duet for Two Hands," by Mary Hayley Bell.

As the Hollywood producer said in the story conference, "Duet" has the mucus of an idea, but it doesn't fill out very well. It is talky when it should be chilling, and when it really gets down to the business of being chilling at the end, it succeeds only in being faintly ridiculous.

Mr. Sullivan, so notable a part of the fine movie, "Great Expectations," now is a surgeon of evil genius who has grafted the hands of a dead man on Hugh Marlowe. (Mr. Marlowe lost his own mitts climbing a mountain.) These new hands are a great bother to Mr. Marlowe, for they are always telling him something, such as how he has loved Mr. Sullivan's daughter for years, even though they never met until they were introduced last night at the Booth.

A Vital Young Actress.

The hands also seem to be urging Mr. Marlowe to do something, but for four scenes he can't quite figure out what. Then he catches. The hands want Mr. Marlowe to do Mr. Sullivan in—but before they become stained with blood Mr. S. conveniently has a fatal heart attack and falls on the middle register of the stage piano.

There isn't much the players can do with a thing like this except get along with it. Miss Redman, the memorable Doll Tearsheet of the Old Vic's "Henry IV, Part II," is an actress of disturbing presence and extraordinary vitality—but these qualities are more or less wasted on the role of the daughter. Mr. Sullivan, a magnificently picturesque, big, fat man, is a splendid actor, perfectly cut for the role of a villain—but even his capabilities can't keep him from looking a mite silly with a hypodermic needle in his paws and a Boris Karloff look on his face in the final scene.

Mr. Marlowe wears white gloves on his new hands and a poetic expression on his face. Minor roles are played by Wynne Clark and Ruth Vivian. The action takes place amidst the fog, wind and gull-calls of an Orkney island, where Charles Elson has built, with producer Robert Reud's money, a nice-looking house for Mr. Sullivan and his daughter.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 8, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

As proof of the drama's ethical virtue, Mary Hayley Bell has introduced moral standards to science in "Duet for Two Hands," which was acted at the Booth last evening. She does not think that a surgeon of low moral character should graft one man's hands on to another's wrists. To say that Miss Bell thinks is to flatter her ironically. In "Duet for Two Hands" she is only feeling her way into an eccentric shudder-show that churns a number of weird ideas into a muddle of idle sensations. Call it a joint-piece about a pair of semi-detachable hands on the eerie Orkney Islands, where the wind-machine blows and no one is happy.

• • •

Make no mistake about it: It is a solemn play. Dr. Edward Sarclet, the mad though brilliant surgeon, has given Stephen Cass, an advanced poet, a fresh pair of hands to replace a couple that were crushed in a mountain accident. Whose hands were they? That's the great question. An extraordinarily sensitive lad, Stephen feels strange impulses coming through them. Up there in the wild Orkney Islands the displaced hands get into everybody's business, including a haunted love affair, to the accompaniment of wild, wet and noisy weather. The characters behave as though they had wandered out of a Gothic romance of a century and a half ago, when goose flesh was in fashion.

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To introduce this English shocker to American audiences, they have been extravagant enough to import a pair of good performers, Joyce Redman, who plays the prescient maid of the Orkneys, is a fiery, agile sprite with a remarkably resonant voice and great gifts for the stage. What she is playing is the Little Match Girl with preternatural overtones, but she plays her vividly and resourcefully. As the iniquitous surgeon, Francis L. Sullivan, a bulky gentleman, is also very interesting—facile, sinister, brilliant, repulsive. He is Charles Laughton without the ham. Hugh Marlowe, who plays the stricken poet, is from the home team. American theatregoers are familiar with his composure in the presence of frenzied plots. At the moment he finds himself applying his dazed good-will to an evening of pretentious fiddle-faddle.

PM

OCTOBER 8, 1947

Kronenberger

A Thriller From England That Forgot About Thrills

From England, for no reason that makes any sense, has come a sort of horror play called *Duet for Two Hands*. Seldom has a genre associated with action been infested with so much talk. Seldom has anything which purported to be drama been so blanketed with dullness. And seldom, finally, has anything so absurd made even a pretense of being so scientific. It's a pity that capable performers like Joyce Redman and Francis L. Sullivan had to cross an ocean to waste their talents.

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Duet for Two Hands tells of a brilliant surgeon who managed to give a poet a new pair of hands after he had lost his own in an accident. In support of this feat, the program cites an actual instance of a man being successfully supplied with a thumb and finger. Although, in the scientific sense, there has never been a finer example of "give 'em a finger and they'll take the whole hand," that is the least of Miss Bell's offenses. Grant Miss Bell her miracle of surgery; grant her her little notion that the new hands are rich in memories of their old life, of the days when they belonged to—yep, a man who was hanged. All that, plus a night of wind and storm in the Orkneys, and a surgeon as evil as he is brilliant, and a passionate young girl who knew the hands when, and a fiery potion made of malted milk and rum, and a lot of screaming gulls and eerie noises, should have something to show for itself.

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Unfortunately, Miss Bell doesn't seem even faintly interested in such matters as pace and excitement and suspense. The only excuse for an absurd yarn is that it shall be made engrossing; but Miss Bell only seems concerned with making hers high-toned. The conversation is doubtless on a more cultured plane than you might expect of the Orkneys; but then, everybody is such a chatterbox that nobody is a menace. That bit of surgery was pretty wonderful, no doubt; but Miss Bell couldn't go on about it more if she had actually performed it. And she has an awful way of telling us, miles ahead of time, everything we *don't* want to know.

As a result, there is little to enjoy in *Duet For Two Hands* beyond some moments of acting. Hugh Marlowe is pretty well sunk, I'm afraid, as the poet; but Miss Redman—as any body who saw her with the Old Vic last year would expect—gives a very good account of herself as the girl; and Mr. Sullivan—the admirable Jaggers of *Great Expectations*—does all that he can as the surgeon.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 8, 1947

'Duet for 2 Hands' Silly Melodrama

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Robert Reud forgot that the play is the thing. He brought over from England such accomplished players as Francis Sullivan, Joyce Redman and Wynne Clark and then saddled them with a melodramatic burlesque called "Duet for Two Hands."

Sullivan plays a fat, gross, sensual plastic surgeon, considered something of a quack by his colleagues until he succeeds in grafting the hands of a dead man upon an English poet injured while mountain climbing.

The doctor brings the poet, who happens to be your old American friend Hugh Marlowe, to his home in the Orkney Islands. There his daughter, really Joyce Redman playing Doll Tearsheet with money and a fishing rod, gallops about like a youthful hag.

The poet believes that the dead man's hands are doing strang things to him. He can remember people, places and songs that never have come into his own experience. He wants to know to whom the hands had belonged.

The doctor gets drunk on a weird concoction of hot malted milk and rum, confesses the hands came from a man who had been hanged because of a murder the doctor had contrived, tries to hack them off the poet and dies of a heart attack from the excitement.

We doubt, however, that anyone attending "Duet for Two Hands" will die from excitement. From an overdose of boredom or heavy sleep, yes. Excitement, no. The Mary Hayley Bell satire on thrillers is a sedative rather than a stimulant.

When Miss Redman washes off her first scene grime, she emerges as an attractive young woman. Much too attractive to be hidden in the floor-length, sombre garments of 1904.

Sullivan gets in his dirtiest work in the last act, when he slops that malted milk and rum goo all over himself and the furniture. He's going to keep the dry cleaners working overtime. He's anything but a fastidious villain.

Reginald Denham has directed this silly little shocker as if it were "Ladies in Retirement."

Effectively cut, "Duet for Two Hands" might become a tepid Grand Guignol one-acter. But given as a full-length play, it should make the Booth Theatre a mecca for insomniacs.

A lady down front fell sound asleep last night. A first nighter shook her awake. "How could you?" asked a friend. "She was having such a nice time sleeping." "Oh, I thought her tiara might fall off and lose a diamond or two," he replied.

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Journal ~~and~~ American

OCTOBER 8, 1947

An English Thriller That Doesn't Thrill

By ROBERT GARLAND

Robert Reud, who produces plays by numerology, should get himself a new numerologist. Or a new and more reliable credulity. Of late, his numbers have been going back on him. They let him down in connection with "The Odds on Mrs. Oakley." Last night, on 45th st., they let him down again in the "Duet For Two Hands."

This "Duet For Two Hands" is one mere English importation. Founded on an operation Mary Hayley Bell read about in some credulous evening paper, last night's would-be thriller was produced two years ago in London's Lyric Theatre. And with no member of the cast which does its durndest in New York's Booth.

"Duet For Two Hands" is a thriller that doesn't thrill. Instead, it works its deliberate way toward a climax that fails to materialize. I venture to say that no hair was raised last evening when, an hour from midnight, young Stephen Cass lifted the hands that were not his own and threatened to kill—

He may even have gone ahead and done it, although I seem to recall that a long arm of coincidence reached out to intervene.

• • •

Thrill-less Thriller

The thriller that doesn't thrill sets out to tell the story of Stephen Cass, a minor poet beloved of Edward Scarlet. And Edward Scarlet is an alcoholic surgeon who also loves a major operation. So how fortunate it is that, when Stephen loses his hands in a mountain-climbing accident, Edward is there to help him!

Edward happens to have an extra pair of hands lying around his workroom. They fit Stephen as if they were his own. So, with a bottle, a nurse, a needle and a thread to help him, Edward makes Stephen as good as new. The catch is that the boy's new hands are borrowed from a murderer.

And, egged on by a love affair, a wailing wind, a whining spirit, a snatch of music and a potion known, I think, as whipscoll, Stephen's borrowed hands get ideas of their own. These ideas have to do with the immediate bumping off of Dr. Edward Sarclet, the one interesting character on view . . .

But the doctor gets heart-failure. And the boy gets girl. And the audience gets out for good behavior.

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Sorry, Wrong Number!

Almost constantly on-stage are two of England's most worthy actors. One is Joyce Redman, as the Abigail Sarclet, Mary Morris played in London. The other is Francis Sullivan, as the Edward Sarclet, Elwyn Brook-Jones dealt with on Shaftesbury ave. Their thrill-less thriller helps them not at all.

Nevertheless, Miss Redman is a player of great promise and fine fulfillment. No New York theatregoer will forget her Doll Tearsheet in "Henry IV: Part 2" as projected hereabouts by the London Old Vic Company. And Mr. Sullivan's Jaggers in the film version of "Great Expectations" is memorable as well.

The others range from pretty good, through merely so-so, to pretty bad. The pretty good is the Hercia Scarlet of Wynn Clark. The merely so-so is the Fletty of Ruth Vivian. The pretty bad is the Stephen Cass of Hugh Marlowe. And Charles Elson's setting isn't unlike the London one by Tony Pelissier. . .

Robert Reud's numerologist certainly told him off in mournful numbers when he okayed "Duet For Two Hands."

"Dear Judas"

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 6, 1947

Choir in Pit Takes 'Dear Judas' Honors

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Dear Judas" is a religious pageant dealing with the personalities most closely connected with the crucifixion of Christ.

It does not seem likely that Robinson Jeffers wrote this work with any idea of its being produced as a drama. The language is poetic, often even lofty, but it is also very obscure. This is the sort of text that should be read, studied and reiterated to be understood.

Listening to it in the theater is an effort because much of the time the speeches are utterly confusing.

There is a minimum of action among the leading figures. In fact they do nothing but enter, make what frequently seem interminable speechs, and go off again.

This physical stillness is relieved by a number of dances which overtly reflect the emotion of the characters. They are choreographed in a modern idiom which sometimes grows monotonous.

Also defining the moods of the work are the Bach chorals which are beautifully sung through the play by a choir in the orchestra pit.

All the figures on the stage except the four principals, Christ, his Mother, Judas and Lazarus, wear masks which look like the rough tortured heads made by the artist Rouault.

There has already been a certain amount of controversy about this play's treatment of the story of Judas. It ascribes to the betrayer a sympathetic motive for his deed, in that he fears that Jesus is a rabble rouser with delusions about a foreordained capacity as a dictator.

Judas thinks Jesus is leading his followers to certain destruction, and feels that he will save them by betraying his Master. He is credited with assuming that Christ will simply be jailed for a short time, long enough for the people to think normally again. He is deeply shocked when he learns of the crucifixion.

That he regretted his treachery is an orthodox fact, and the play here ends with his declared intention to hang himself.

It is unfortunate that the play seems unlikely to stir any enormous amount of argument, because it is simply not very moving or interesting.

The obscurity of the language makes attention a strain. The lack of action makes the play extremely literary.

The actors play with a solemn awe which is respectful but which puts elocutionary values above those of passion or content. Because the story is so well known should be all the more reason to present this interpretation in such a way that the powerful emotions of the characters stir an audience.

The fervor and vehemence underlying the people and events is never even touching.

Ferdi Hoffman plays the Carpenter, Margaret Wycherly his Mother, Roy Hargrave the Judas and Harry Irvine is Lazarus.

The most disturbing and effective contribution to the evening is made by the singers under Lehman Engel's direction. They bring great vitality and spirit to the Bach music.

'DEAR JUDAS.'

Play by Michael Myerberg, adapted from the original work by Robinson Jeffers; music of Johann Sebastian Bach selected and arranged by Lehmann Engel; dances and mimes by Esther Junger; costumes and masks by Mary Percy Schenck; scenery and lighting by Albert Johnson; presented by Michael Myerberg at the Mansfield Theater, Sunday evening, October 5, 1947. The cast:

The Carpenter	Ferdi Hoffman
Judas	Roy Hargrave
The Woman	Margaret Wycherly
Lazarus	Harry Irvine
Peter	Tony Charmoli
Simon	Richard Astor
John	Batiz Lee

Synopsis: Scene: The Garden.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 6, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Out of a difficult poem by Robinson Jeffers, Michael Myerberg has constructed an engrossing work of theatre. The poem is "Dear Judas". It was acted in the form of a masque at the Mansfield last evening. In honor of the quality of imagination that has gone into the production it would be a privilege to describe the result as triumphant. For Mr. Myerberg, acting as his own director, has imagined it in terms of exalted theatre.

The poem is austere; the spirit of it is thoughtful but earthbound. As the high priest of poetic theatre, Mr. Myerberg has enriched it with choruses from Johann Sebastian Bach, macabre masks, ritualized miming, groupings like figures in a holy frieze and all this against a withered setting in spectral lighting by Albert Johnson. As theatre "Dear Judas" has an aura of magnificence that is increasingly rare on Broadway.

* * *

Mr. Jeffers did not write his poem for statement in the theatre. Although the phrasing is poetic in sharp, modern lines, the poem is a rationalization of a sacred theme and difficult to understand. Mr. Jeffers represents Judas, not as a greedy betrayer, but as a man of tender apprehensions who is alarmed by the revolution Jesus is engendering. Though this Judas does not believe in Jesus' divinity, he loves Jesus. He points out Jesus to the centurions in the hope of stopping a dangerous revolution before it gets out of hand, and never foreseeing that the law would require Jesus' crucifixion.

Although the character of Judas is clear enough, the character of Jesus is complex and confusing. Looking back speculatively after nineteen hundred years and without religious fervor, Mr. Jeffers draws Jesus as a very complicated person, with personal ambition, hunger for power and bitterness toward his mother. As the title of the poem indicates, Jesus is a secondary character and hardly a winning one.

The form of "Dear Judas" is compact and not theatrical. With a good deal of ingenuity Mr. Myerberg has broken up the masses of thought by stylized movements on the stage, shadows on the horizon, sacred music by the choir and one stirring religious processional at the close of the first act. In Lehman Engel's neat and understanding arrangements the choir music is the chief glory of this production. Incidentally, the production needs a choir requiem at the final curtain, which lacks authority in the theatre.

* * *

Some of the acting is extraordinarily good. As the mother of Jesus, Margaret Wycherly is acting not only with skill but with human and religious passion in the climax of the play. Harry Irvine, master of poetic declamation, plays the part of Lazarus well and shows how lucid difficult verse can be when a talented actor understands it. Roy Hargrave acts Judas as a weak, overly sensitive young man of good impulses who makes panicky decisions. Mr. Hargrave is communicating the part as it has been written with clarity, intelligence and skill.

In the part of Jesus, called "The Carpenter" in the cast, Ferdi Hoffman has the physical stature and the voice for a commanding figure and he plays it well enough on a literal plane. But, like Mr. Jeffers, he does not give it the majesty of a great leader of people, shining from within.

For Mr. Jeffers does not have Mr. Myerberg's exalted feeling for "Dear Judas." By enthusiasm and imagination Mr. Myerberg has tried to lift it out of the study into splendor and beauty. If "Dear Judas" were an inspired work of art, he might have succeeded wholly.

New York Post

OCTOBER 6, 1947

Drama About Judas Theatrically Dull

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Although Robinson Jeffers is one of America's most eminent poets and Michael Myerberg an enterprising and courageous producer, the result of their collaboration was a disappointing one at the Mansfield Theatre last night. It was Mr. Myerberg's plan to arrange the Jeffers philosophical poem, "Dear Judas," in dramatic terms, with masks, dances and the music of Johan Sebastian Bach to heighten the emotional values, and the idea promised an interesting and original theatrical novelty, to say the least. The only trouble is that it doesn't work out.

For one thing, the result is intensely undramatic, in the most soporific sort of way. Since I am among the illiterates who have never read the poem, I had to depend on the actors for an appreciation of its eloquence and meaning, and I am forced to say that last night "Dear Judas" seemed not only tedious drama but considerably less than first-rate poetry. If its philosophical import was difficult to follow, it was less because the meaning is subtle and profound than because the verse is so dull that it is almost impossible to concentrate on it with any interest.

The Carpenter

"Dear Judas" has been objected to on theological grounds, but it is not the unorthodox interpretation of Christ and Judas that is likely to disturb most spectators in the current production. There is every reason to believe that the drama's brooding contemplation of the motives of its protagonists was intended to emphasize the humanity and the spiritual and emotional richness of its immortal story. It cannot be denied, though, that the treatment has merely destroyed the majesty of the character it calls the Carpenter without adding anything in the way of humanity.

As the two leading figures emerge in the Jeffers-Myerberg version, Christ is little more than a somewhat vainglorious social rebel with delusions of grandeur, while Judas is a loyal but spiritually tortured follower who tries to save his Leader from the dangerous results of his folly. Certainly Jeffers had more to say than this. He was concerned with the passionate efforts of two great tragic spirits to find truth and meaning in the double tragedy in which they had enacted their mighty roles, but he has portrayed this in terms which, even if the poetry is better than I think it is, are hopelessly lacking in dramatic effectiveness.

Restless Shades

"Dear Judas" is by no means a direct retelling of the Passion Play. Its narrative manner is fairly obscure, but what it attempts is, I gather, to show its protagonists as restless, tormented shades, reliving a past, too vivid to be forgotten, in all its anguish. There are but four speaking characters, the Carpenter, Judas, the Mother and Lazarus, the others being represented only by grotesquely masked figures.

So vague and undramatic are the roles that the actors seem lost in them. Roy Hargrave, looking a bit sinister for so sympathetic a part as that of Judas, has the only scene that is even remotely moving, following the crucifixion. Ferdi Hoffman as the Carpenter and Margaret Wycherly as the Mother are less than impressive, and only Harry Irvine in the brief part of Lazarus manages the verse with any show of eloquence. With all its high ambitions, "Dear Judas" emerges as a dull and pompous stunt.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 6, 1947

'Dear Judas' Proves A Soporific

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Michael Myerberg is intelligent and courageous. When he likes a play he produces it with hardly a glance toward the box office. You may sometimes doubt his judgment, but you cannot doubt his artistic integrity.

Myerberg brought to the Mansfield Theatre last night a dramatization of Robinson Jeffers' controversial poem, "Dear Judas". He also prepared the dramatization and staged it. He is a versatile man.

"Dear Judas" is a justification of the betrayal of Christ by Judas Iscariot. According to Jeffers and Myerberg, Judas was a kindly, gentle man. He embraced Christ as the teacher of meekness and mercy.

But he was disillusioned when Christ fashioned a whip and drove the money changers and sellers of sacrificial commodities from the Temple. Christ, he thought according to Jeffers and Myerberg, had lost his humility and resorted to violence and might cause many in the city of Jerusalem to lose their lives in conflict.

Christ, decided Judas, had now come too close to the power that sends hurricanes down to destroy and devastate. He was forsaking non-resistance for action. His stern ideas of justice had driven pity from his heart. He had become fascinated with his demagogic power to arouse the multitudes.

So Judas, fearful of the effects of Christ's acts on his people, decided to turn him over to the priests, who, he thought, would jail him for a few days until the city was pacified and then release him. When he found that, instead, Christ had been crucified, Judas hanged himself.

We think the Jeffers-Myerberg defense of Judas will offend the devout and bore the iconoclasts. Even those who, along with Myerberg, may espouse the Jeffers version of the betrayal will find it lacking lucidity and dramatic appeal.

The Jeffers work would be a test in the library. It is often a torment in the theatre. Should you decide to hear it read by Ferdi Hoffman, Roy Hargrave, Margaret Wycherly and Harry Irvine at the Mansfield take along a cushion or two. You will doze more comfortably. Sleeping tablets are superfluous.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 6, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

The Theater Betrayed

ROBINSON JEFFERS'S mystical apologia for Iscariot has been given mannered and muddled theatrical projection in "Dear Judas." The Michael Myerberg adaptation of the original work at the Mansfield is provocative without being sensible: stagy without being effective. There are a few moments of poetic grandeur in this account of the Carpenter, his betrayer, the Woman and Lazarus. There is a lovely musical accompaniment, arranged by Lehmann Engel from Johann Sebastian Bach's chorals. These benisons and the obvious sincerity of the script and the staging do not keep the work from being exceedingly untidy.

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The producer-author-director, who may be favorably remembered for such stunning off-track contributions to Broadway as "The Skin of Our Teeth" and "Lute Song," has become lost in a maze of declamatory nonsense, masks, dances and mimes in this trying enterprise. There is a stuttering attempt to link Judaism and Christianity in the exposition. Judas comes through in flickering outlines as a man who turned in his Master for love and fear of insurrection rather than cupidity. Symbolism is called on more or less at random to give the theme a bit of pageantry. The fact is that both the miming and the acting accentuate the pretentious and tasteless aspects of the offering.

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Granted that the roles they have been assigned are not particularly comfortable, Ferdi Hoffman, Margaret Wycherly, Roy Hargrave and Harry Irvine do virtually nothing to aid matters at the Mansfield. The last-named performer brings a certain dignity to the part of Lazarus as he informs Mary of the Crucifixion. His coprincipals may have been spiritually and artistically intent, but they are generally ridiculous. Hoffman strides around in boots and a sports shirt, testing his followers and His betrayer. He is lucky when the Mutes—Peter, Simon and John—the dancers, the priests, the Roman guards and the torchbearers crowd Him off the stage.

Hargrave attacks what amounts to the central role of Judas with a querulous monotony that would have been downright aggravating were it not for his hysterical climax. That bit of mummery must be seen to be believed. Miss Wycherly looks alternately shocked and bemused by the awful circumstances in which she participates. Myerberg has occasionally given his players an opportunity to act, but they are as hard to take then as they are in their hortatory soliloquies about remembering the future or their befuddled Biblical allusions. The dances by Esther Junger and the costumes and masks by Mary Percy Schenck are all of a piece an embarrassing show. Bach is the only one to glean a bit of reclame from this production.

The Sun

OCTOBER 6, 1947

'Dear Judas' Is Awkward and Unimpressive Upon Stage of the Mansfield.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Michael Myerberg, a non-conformist and a bold experimentalist in a theater that is brazenly commercial, turns to Biblical drama in "Dear Judas," submitted last night at the Mansfield. For all the author-producer's fine intentions, he has wasted his time on a singularly awkward and unimpressive play.

There are four speaking parts in "Dear Judas," adapted from the poem of Robinson Jeffers, and it is done to the accompaniment of chorals by Johann Sebastian Bach. To many playgoers this new piece may seem offensive and sacrilegious, but to judge it entirely upon its merits, or its lack of them, and as a production upon a Broadway stage, it is a play without beauty or dignity or dramatic force.

The characters who speak are the Carpenter (Christ), Judas, the Woman (the Virgin Mary) and Lazarus. Judas, in the Myerberg adaptation, and as played by Roy Hargrave, is presented as a martyr, as an agonized disciple who sees it as his duty to stop his Master's teachings. When his pleadings and his warnings of Roman vengeance go unheeded he feels that only one course is left to him. Hence, the betrayal. Judas, in Hargrave's jerky, somewhat sinister interpretation, comes forth as a tormented neurotic who finally seeks peace by hanging himself from a cypress tree.

Ferdi Hoffman, wearing a woodsman's knee boots and a checkered shirt, projects the Carpenter as an outspoken and active figure and as a singularly unmoving one. Harry Irvine gets some feeling into his reading as the disinterred Lazarus and Margaret Wycherly has some effective moments after she has learned that her son has died upon Calvary.

The singers of the Bach chorals are huddled in the orchestra pit, within view of the audience, and masks are worn by the nonspeaking disciples, priests, Roman guards and dancers. Albert Johnson did the scenery and lighting for the production.

"Dear Judas" is iconoclastic and anti-scriptural and it is also very tedious and undramatic.

Journal American

OCTOBER 6, 1947

No Power and Glory In Ideological Play

By ROBERT GARLAND

As a most fallible of Christians, born and baptized into the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States, I see no real reason to register objection to the theological ideology of "Dear Judas," produced by Michael Myerberg last night at the Mansfield Theatre.

As a most fallible of critics, paid and portfolioed by the Journal-American of New York, I see no reason to report an admiration for the theatrical effectiveness of Mr. Myerberg's adaption of the Robinson Jeffers poem, which was the season's first Sunday opening.

If, because of my lack of infallibility as a Christian, "Dear Judas" does, in some manner unrecognized by me, offend the tenets of my faith, I'm sure the offense is not intentional and that, as almost too reverently projected, it can do my faith no irrevocable harm.

And if, because of my lack of infallibility as a critic, "Dear Judas" is, in some manner unrecognized by me, more theatrically effective than I found it, I'm sure my lack of admiration is not intentional and that it will reach its rightful audience just as it should.

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No Glory Remains

The argument, which well may be the Jeffers-Myerberg one, that Judas is a tragic, rather than a damnatory, figure in the Christian chronography is neither startling nor new. Especially to the readers of the fourth and final Gospel, the Gospel according to St. John.

And, in more recent and profane retellings of the Divine Tragedy in the Garden of Gethsemane, the inevitability of—or the necessity for—the Iscariot betrayal has been advanced by Marie Corelli, George Moore, and half a hundred nonconformists writing in between.

At the Last Supper, in response to Simon Peter's interrogation, was it not Judas Iscariot to whom Jesus gave the sop? St. John of the Gospel says it was. And after many reassertions of that sacred predestinarian gesture, Michael Myerberg and Robinson Jeffers agree.

And, in their "Dear Judas," this is all that has been added to the Gospels according to Sts. Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. On the other hand, much that is reverential, restorative and radiant has been removed. None of the power and the glory of the Son of God and Man remains.

Uninspired

Michael Myerberg who, with the courage of convictions, adapted and staged this transcription of the Robinson Jeffers original, is not inspired in his staging of "Dear Judas." His passion play substitutes ostentation for simplicity, artiness for devotion.

And a company of forty, headed by Ferdi Hoffman as The Carpenter, Margaret Wycherly as The Woman, Harry Irvine as Lazarus and Roy Hargrave as Judas, is not simple or devotional, either. Especially those principals. Their heads, rather than their hearts, are in what they're doing.

Singers in the orchestra pit raise and lower their voices in Johann Sebastian Bach chorals, magnificently arranged by Lehmann Engel. Dancers and mimers on stage go through the movements prescribed by Esther Junger, in costumes and masks supplied by Mary Schenck.

Dominating the entire Meyerberg-Jeffers collaboration, the decor of Albert Johnson is painfully proscriptive . . . "Dear Judas" is inoffensive to a Christian, ineffective to a critic, and, to the Christian critic, the profane translation of a sacred story, arty, pretentious and uncalled for.